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**MULTIMETHOD STUDY OF A HIGHER EDUCATION SPECIAL ADMISSIONS
POLICY: EXPLORING HOW STUDENT-ATHLETES NAVIGATE THEIR
EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES**

by

Sean Patrick Hendricks

A Dissertation Proposal

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
At
Rowan University

Dissertation Chair: Tyrone McCombs, Ph.D.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my beautiful wife, Jeanne, and amazing daughters, Blakely and Callan. I am eternally grateful for your love and support.

Acknowledgements

There are several people that made significant contributions to this dissertation; without their guidance and support this project would not have been possible. I wish to extend a sincere thank you to my committee: Dr. Tyrone McCombs, Dr. Ane Turner Johnson, and Dr. Brian Repici. Your commitment to student success was clearly evident during the duration of this project.

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Abstract

Sean Patrick Hendricks

MULTIMETHOD STUDY OF A HIGHER EDUCATION SPECIAL ADMISSIONS POLICY: EXPLORING HOW STUDENT-ATHLETES NAVIGATE THEIR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

2014

Dr. Tyrone McCombs

Doctorate in Educational Leadership

In higher education, it is the role of the institution to ensure the success of all students, even those that failed to meet general admission requirements (Tinto, 1993). This explanatory sequential mixed methods study explored the challenges associated with enrolling student-athletes at a Division III institution with less than desirable admission standards (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This study examined 199 specially admitted student-athletes that enrolled at Kerry State between 2007 and 2011 and found that increasing tuition, a lack of support and proper advising, time constraints, and issues related to student engagement have contributed to the lack of success from this population. Additionally, the enrollment standards at Kerry State have dramatically increased over the last five years, leading to the institution continually enrolling a more academically prepared student body. This has placed specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State University in a disadvantageous position. To better serve the needs of this population, Kerry State could implement a support program to assist this group as they navigate their educational pathways. This support program would include offering a college success course during specially admitted student-athlete's first semester to help facilitate the transition from high school to college level academics. Additionally, the institution could increase communication between the athletic department and advising center to better serve the academic needs of this population.

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Chapter I

Introduction

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012), close to 20 million students enrolled in American colleges in the fall of 2011. Many of these students will graduate in the future with a bachelor's degree and enter the workforce. Some, however, lack the necessary skills and understanding of available resources and will fail to graduate. A considerable body of research exists regarding the college experience and since the 1970s scholars have attempted to illuminate why some are persistent and graduate while others are not as successful (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980).

A major catalyst for the successful completion of a college degree is the interaction a student has with the campus environment. A highly involved student has a greater likelihood of completing a degree (Astin, 1985; Kuh, 1995; Tinto, 1975). Astin (1999) defines a highly involved student as someone who, “devotes considerable energy to studying, spends time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students” (p. 518). Astin's (1999) research on developmental theory explicitly underscores the importance of college students partaking in educationally meaningful activities.

Persistence: A Theoretical Background

Three important theories are critical for understanding college student success. These theories revolve around the concepts of involvement, engagement, and integration. The concepts are unique and often used interchangeably, even though each has a distinct meaning. Deciphering the differences in each theory is important for understanding best practices (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). Involvement theory revolves around the time students spend

studying, completing homework, and collaborating with classmates. It also accounts for time students spend working and living on campus, participating in clubs and organizations, and socializing with friends (Astin, 1999, 1993; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Involvement is an essential component for student development because it involves formal and informal modes of learning. Tinto (1997) states, “the greater students’ involvement in the life of the college, especially in academic life, the greater their acquisition of knowledge and development of skills” (p. 600).

Engagement theory is used to explain the interaction a student has with educationally related activities established by the institution (Kuh, 2009; Pascarella, 1985; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Engagement differs from involvement in that it places a greater onerous burden on the institution (Tinto, 1988; Wolf-Wendel, et al., 2009). Kuh (2009) defines student engagement as, “the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities” (p. 683). The student has the responsibility to partake in educationally stimulating activities, but the responsibility of engaging students and fostering authentic learning lies with the institution. Engagement forces institutions to develop and implement stimulating educational practices (Wolf-Wendel, et al., 2009).

The last theory is integration and is defined by Wolf-Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie (2009) as, “the extent to which students come to share the attitudes and beliefs of their peers and faculty and the extent to which students adhere to the structural rules and requirements of the institution-the institutional culture” (p. 414). Integration for college students involves becoming a member within the institutional community. Tinto’s (1993) theory of integration emphasizes how important it is for students to integrate into formal and informational academic systems, as well

as formal and informal social systems. Tinto's (1993) theory stresses the importance of educational opportunities for all. These programs should be designed to integrate students as competent members of the community.

The three theories are critical for understanding student success and the various factors impacting educational outcomes (Wolf-Wendel, et al., 2009). Both the student and institution play a central role in the educational experiences that students have with the campus community (Astin, 1985; Kuh, 1995; Tinto, 1993). As such, student persistence is a shared responsibility.

Students enter college at different academic levels, making it challenging to meet the varying needs of each student, as some are more prepared than others. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the individual institution to implement programming to ensure the success of all students (Astin, 1968; Tinto, 1993). One group presenting additional challenges for colleges is the group of student-athletes that enroll each year. Student-athletes are a unique group that has academic and social demands different from the typical student (Watt & Moore, 2001).

Persistence and the Student-Athlete

For student-athletes whose time is limited because of the demands affiliated with college athletics, managing available free time is often a difficult task (Watt & Moore, 2001; Person & LeNoir, 1997). According to Astin's (1985) student involvement theory, students in college have a finite amount of time available for educational purposes. Essentially, educators are competing for students' time and energy.

A student's academic development is a direct function of the time spent advancing educational talents (Astin, 1985). For student-athletes, so much of their energy is focused on the practice and game field, developing athletic talents, often leaving little time to develop academic

talents (Watt & Moore, 2001; Person & LeNoir, 1997). Student-athletes face additional challenges because of the rigors of college athletics.

Furthermore, participating in intercollegiate athletics adds to the challenges students undergo during their tenure on college campuses. The obligation of academic work and athletic affairs can be exhausting (Watt & Moore, 2001). As a result of their arduous schedules, student-athletes must utilize their time wisely to excel in the classroom. For many student athletes, the process can be overwhelming and obstruct the opportunity for academic success (Adler & Adler, 1985; Jolly, 2008).

In addition to classes, social activities, and studying, student-athletes have additional athletic demands, including exercising and weightlifting, practicing, participating in games, and other various team functions (Watt & Moore, 2001; Person & LeNoir, 1997). Participating in athletics limits the amount of time available for completing assignments and studying for exams. As a result, student-athletes have increased academic, social, physical, personal, and emotional challenges (Watson & Kissinger, 2007; Jolly, 2008).

Person and LeNoir (1997) found that athletes spend about 28 hours a week on athletics and 23 hours a week on academics. Some of the students in the study spent upwards of 40 hours a week on athletics. On average, the student-athletes in the study missed two classes a week while in-season and one class during the off-season (Person & LeNoir, 1997). For those who are disciplined and possess good time management skills, the process is manageable and can often catapult the student-athlete into doing well in the classroom. For those who lack these skills, the process can be overwhelming and lead to failure (Jolly, 2008).

The Division III Student-Athlete

There are over 400,000 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) student-athletes enrolled in America's higher education institutions (NCAA, 2012). Participating in intercollegiate sports allows students the opportunity to compete in athletic arenas while earning a degree. As a result of comprehensive academic reform in 2004 that forces institutions to measure academic progress rates (APR) on a term by term basis, the NCAA has reported higher graduation rates for student-athletes (NCAA, 2012). These statistics however do not pertain to Division III athletics, as the NCAA only collects graduation data on Division I and II institutions. Division III institutions are not required to report graduation rates. As a result, it is uncertain if the current academic success from student-athletes involves those at the Division III level (NCAA, 2012).

In August 1973, the NCAA passed legislation separating institutions that offer athletic programs into three divisions, changing the legislative and competitive structure (NCAA, 2012). Division I and Division II institutions typically have a larger study body and receive more notoriety for their athletic programs (Tobin, 2005). These institutions also have admissions requirements set forth by the NCAA that students must obtain if they choose to participate in athletics. The NCAA however, allows Division III institutions to enact their own admission policies. The NCAA (2012) website states, "Division III institutions hold student-athletes to the same overall standards for the institution in which the student-athlete is enrolling." As a result, Division III institutions must determine how to implement admission policies that allow teams to remain competitive without jeopardizing the academic integrity of the institution.

Division III student-athletes are obligated to meet specific admissions criteria that mirrors that of the general study body. The NCAA (2012) website states, "Division III features student-

athletes who are subject to the same admission standards, academic standards, housing, and support services as the general student body.” However, in the event that students do not qualify for general admission, many Division III institutions employ a special admit system, sometimes referred to as an athletic admit system to allow athletic departments to enroll student-athletes with lower high school academic scores (Laden, Matranga, & Peltier, 1999). This research project that explored the irrationalities of a system that accepts and enrolls student-athletes with less than desirable scholastic aptitude test (SAT) scores and high school grade point averages (GPAs), and fails to provide additional academic support was certainly warranted.

Specially admitted student-athletes at the Division III level are expected to perform well academically in college, even though they produced substandard results in high school. If the obligation to ensure the academic success of all students lies with the college or university (Tinto, 1993), it may be counterproductive to accept students with lower SAT scores and/or high school GPAs and not provide the academic support needed to succeed academically (Watt & Moore, 2001).

Context of the Study

Kerry State University is a public institution located in the Mid-Atlantic Region. The Carnegie Classification for Kerry State is M4/R-Medium (four-year, primarily residential). Kerry State’s student body consists of about 8,500 underclassman and 2,500 graduate students. Kerry State is a Division III institution with roughly 500 student-athletes participating in varsity athletics each year. Admission guidelines for Kerry State varies annually and typically require a minimum SAT and GPA score. Many of the student-athletes enroll by meeting the general requirements set forth by Kerry State University administration officials; however some, because of their athletic abilities, are permitted to enroll with lower high school scores. These students,

known as special admits, often have SAT scores and/or GPAs well below the average Kerry State student.

Annually, the Kerry State University Athletic Department, consisting of 18 varsity sports, is permitted to accept about 50 students that do not meet general admission requirements. Many of these students are not prepared to handle the rigors of college academics. Over the past several years, as a volunteer in the athletic department, I have witnessed student-athletes enrolling through the special admit system, only to become academically ineligible because of poor grades. Student-athletes at Kerry State are required to maintain a 2.0 GPA or better if they wish to continue participating in athletics (NCAA, 2012).

Kerry State University Athletic Department does not have an integrated system to ensure that specially admitted students are receiving the services needed to excel in the classroom and remain on pace to graduate. Some could argue that it is negligent and irresponsible to enroll students with far lower academic scores than the average student and not provide additional services. Therefore, the present study was designed to explore the challenges that specially admitted student-athletes endure as they navigate their educational pathways.

Statement of the Problem

Student-athletes are a unique group possessing uncommon talents. This group of students also presents unique challenges for higher education institutions (Holsendolph, 2006). If the primary objective is to ensure the academic success of all students, then higher education officials should understand the complexities that student-athletes endure, and implement policies to aid their academic and personal development. The main issue for this study is two fold; lack of research regarding the phenomenon of student-athletes participating at the Division III level and

lack of academic support to help guide the academic development of this particular group of students that needed a special admit to enroll (Watt & Moore, 2001).

The research involving student-athletes at the Division I level is extensive, however very few studies address the phenomenon of student-athletes participating at the Division III level (Robst & Keil, 2000). Division III athletic programs are not permitted to offer athletic scholarships, nor are they required to report graduation rates for student-athletes (NCAA, 2012). Unfortunately, for those at the Division III level, very few studies explore how these student-athletes navigate their academic experiences, and even fewer examine students that failed to qualify for general admission and required a special admit to enroll at a particular institution (Robst & Keil, 2000). Studies addressing the phenomenon of Division III student-athletes needing a special admit to enroll are virtually nonexistent.

The graduation rate for student-athletes at the Division I and II level has improved over the last ten years (Graham, 2012). It is unknown if these current trends pertain to those at the Division III level. This is problematic because the NCAA sets the policies for student-athletes to participate in intercollegiate athletics. However, there is not a uniform system that the NCAA enforces at the Division III level and allows institutions to enact their own admission policies. This is problematic because there is a sizeable academic gap between the general student body and those that are specially admitted.

The academic disparity between specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State and the general student body is staggering. The average deposited freshman at Kerry in the fall of 2011 scored a 1,091 on the SAT and had a 3.5 GPA (Kerry State Admissions Office Annual Report, 2013). Meanwhile, specially admitted student-athletes only needed to obtain an 820 SAT score and 2.0 GPA to be accepted and enrolled. Many student-athletes needed a special admit to enroll

because of substandard SAT scores. However, numerous student-athletes enroll each year with both lower SAT scores and GPAs. The academic disparity for the two groups contributes to specially admitted student-athletes struggling in the classroom. Prior to this study, it was unknown how well this group of students performed academically.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges that specially admitted student-athletes endure as they navigate their educational experiences. This study was guided by Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) second edition of *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. A two-phase, explanatory sequential mixed methods design was used to obtain quantitative data before crafting a qualitative phase for further analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006). This research design allowed me to collect and analyze quantitative (numeric) results before collecting rich, thick qualitative (text) data (Ivankova et al., 2006). Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) state, "The overall purpose of this design is to use a qualitative strand to explain initial quantitative results" (p. 82).

In the first phase, quantitative phase of the study, a questionnaire was administered to the previous five classes (2007-2011) of specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State University. The second phase, qualitative phase of the study, was given precedence in this study and involved administering standardized open-ended interviews that explored the perceptions of those involved with the special admit system (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Seidman, 2006). This study was certainly warranted, as there are so few mixed methods studies that pertain to Division III athletics (Robst & Keil, 2000). My findings and analysis were developed as a result of both phases.

The explanatory mixed methods design was advantageous for this research project because it allowed me to collect and analyze the academic standing of the sample population, as well as the general perceptions of those that used the special admit system to gain admission to Kerry State. The quantitative phase was not sufficient enough to fully answer the research questions and a second qualitative strand was needed to provide a thorough analysis of the challenges these students endure. Therefore, the qualitative phase was given priority in this research project (Creswell, 2007).

This study involved specially admitted student-athletes and examined how this population navigates the process of enrolling as freshman and advancing, or failing to advance, toward graduation. This study also explored the academic services provided and ways in which these students interact with these services. The major objectives of this research project were to gain a better understanding of the academic standing of specially admitted student-athletes and add to the literature regarding Division III student-athletes.

My research ideas stem from working at Kerry State University and witnessing numerous student-athletes using the special admit system and not possessing the knowledge and skills to succeed in the classroom. Over the past several years, I have observed various student-athletes become academically ineligible after their first semester on campus. This is detrimental to the student, team, and institution.

Research Questions

For purposes of this research project, I used a two-phase, explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The tenets of this approach allowed me to analyze, in two distinct phases, the special admit system deployed by the Kerry State University Athletic Department. For purposes of this research study, the special admit system is defined as a

program that allows student-athletes with lower high school academic scores to be accepted and enroll at Kerry State. The study is driven by four research questions:

1. What challenges do specially admitted student-athletes encounter at Kerry State University as they navigate their academic experiences?
2. What support systems are currently in place to aid student-athletes as they enroll and advance toward graduation at Kerry State University?
3. In what ways do the challenges specially admitted student-athletes endure help to explain the academic standing of these students?
4. What significant themes emerged as a result of this mixed methods research project?

The mixed methods approach allowed me to collect quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of sources, including coaches, student-athletes, and athletic and admissions personnel. At the commencement of this project, I worked with the Admissions Department to obtain the list of specially admitted students that enrolled between 2007 and 2011. Next, I worked with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research and Planning (IERP) to collect data regarding participants' high school GPA, SAT scores, and current academic standing (cumulative Kerry State GPA and enrollment status).

After obtaining academic data about the sample population, I used quantitative data collection methods to analyze the perceptions of the sample population. This data provided initial information pertaining to the challenges and obstacles of this population. To collect qualitative data, I conducted 20 open-ended interviews with student-athletes, advisors, and athletic department members. The interview data allowed me to expand on the initial quantitative findings. This furthered my understanding of student challenges and allowed me to fully answer the research questions.

Significance of the Study

This study has significant ramifications for future generations of Division III student-athletes, especially those enrolled at Kerry State. As previously stated, very little is known about this population of underrepresented students (Robst & Keil, 2000). This section is separated into three sections: policy, practice, and research. Each section underscores the importance of this study and contributes to the advancement of knowledge regarding Division III athletics.

Research. Although research about the hardships that student-athletes experience is bountiful, these studies seldom involve those at the Division III level (Robst & Keil, 2000). Additional research was needed to understand the phenomenon of those participating in Division III level. Furthermore, very little is known about student-athletes that enroll with sub-par academic scores and require a special admit. Very few studies have addressed the academic performance of student-athletes that enrolled with inferior academic scores, especially those at the Division III level. This study sheds light on the academic success, or lack thereof, of this underrepresented group.

Practice. The Kerry State University Athletic Department utilizes the special admit system to compete with other teams at the Division III level. The student-athletes, who are accepted and enroll, help Kerry State's athletic teams excel on the playing field. For coaches, whose jobs often rely on winning, this system is needed to ensure their teams remain competitive. My intentions for this study were not to eliminate the special admit system, but rather, further understand its complexities and evaluate measures currently in place to identify deficiencies.

In this research project a program was identified, student-athletes enrolling with lower academic scores and not being supported academically, which is counterproductive to ensuring

the success of all students. If Kerry State and other Division III institutions are purposely enrolling students because of their athletic abilities and are only concerned with their performance on the playing field, action is needed. The NCAA has set enrollment standards for Division I and II schools to abide (NCAA, 2012). It is long overdue that the NCAA implements enrollment guidelines for Division III institutions. The most logical guidelines would seem to be those that are currently being utilized by Division I (sliding scale based on SAT score and GPA) or Division II (820 SAT and 2.0 GPA) (NCAA, 2012).

From an advocacy perspective, this study has significant implications for future practices at Kerry State University. It is unjust to continue to accept student-athletes, many of whom are minorities and/or the first in their family to attend college, and not provide additional support. Utilizing an advocacy/participatory worldview, my desire was to expose the irrationalities of the current system and create change (Creswell, 2007).

Policy. This study has significant implications for future policies regarding Division III athletics. Understandably, Division I studies outweigh the available research on student-athletes (Tobin, 2005). There are similarities between student-athletes among the divisions; however Division III student-athletes are uniquely different than those at the Division I level. Division I and II colleges and universities have the ability to offer full-athletic scholarships, whereas the NCAA prohibits Division III institutions from offering financial aid based on athletic performance (NCAA, 2012). Many Division I and II colleges and universities hire academic professionals to aid student athletes; however because of financial constraints many Division III schools are unable to hire these same professionals (Holsendolph, 2006). Often, Division III student athletes enroll with similar scores as those at the Division I and II level, but do not receive the same academic guidance and support (Holsendolph, 2006).

Higher education institutions have an obligation to implement policies and practices to ensure the academic success of all students (Astin, 1985; Kuh, 1995; Tinto, 1993). This is a daunting task, as students are uniquely different, presenting new challenges. Especially taxing for institutions are the students that participate in varsity athletics (Sigelman, 1995). If the primary objective is to ensure the academic success of all students, institutions need to understand the complexities that student athletes endure, and implement supportive programs and policies to aid their academic development.

Limitations of the Study

As standard with any research project of this magnitude, limitations are an issue and need to be addressed. This section is designed to discuss factors that limited the optimum project from being conducted. There were two major limitations with this research project, (1) access to updated student contact information and (2) the within-site case study approach limited the findings to one institution.

Prior to the commencement of this research project, I worked with Kerry State's IERP office to gather demographic information about the sample population. This information included student email addresses and phone numbers, which were used by students while enrolled at Kerry State. It is important to note that not all of the participants in this study are currently enrolled, as some have graduated, transferred, dropped out, or withdrawn from taking courses. Prior to this project, I did not expect all participants to be actively taking classes or currently checking their Kerry State student email account.

The questionnaire, and three reminder emails, was sent to the sample population electronically and 34 of the 199 students completed it. For those that did not complete the on-line survey, a phone call was placed to ascertain the information. An additional 11 students

completed the survey via telephone calls; however some of the student-athletes had telephone numbers no longer in use. Therefore, not every student in the sample population was able to be contacted and limited the total number of participants in the study. However, data collected during phone calls came from a wide variety of student-athletes with very diverse academic backgrounds. This helped decrease the potential biases that may have been uncovered as a result of only collecting data from those that returned the on-line survey. This also added to the validity of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The second limitation pertains to the approach used for this research project. This study employed a within-site case study approach (Yin, 2003) and examined only the student-athletes that were specially admitted at Kerry State between 2007 and 2011. It did not examine other Division III institutions and the support services they provide for specially admitted student-athletes. Therefore, generalizing results to other Division III institutions should be done with caution.

Definition of Terms

(1) National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) - The National Collegiate Athletic Association was founded more than one hundred years ago. It is the governing board that monitors and regulates policies and procedures for intercollegiate athletics. The NCAA implements policies, “to govern competition in a fair, safe, equitable and sportsmanlike manner, and to integrate intercollegiate athletics into higher education so that the educational experience of the student-athlete is paramount” (NCAA, 2012). The NCAA is separated into several divisions, Division I, II, and III.

(2) Special Admit System/Program - Program utilized by the Kerry State University Athletic Department (and many other Division III institutions) to allow student-athletes who possess

unique athletic talents to enroll, even though they have lower high school academic scores (SAT scores and GPAs).

(3) Student-Athlete - Term used to define a student that is an active member of a varsity sport. Kerry State University offers eighteen varsity sports, ten women's sports and eight men's sports.

(4) Division I Athletics – Institutions participating in this division must sponsor at least seven sports for men and seven for women. Institutions must meet minimum financial aid awards to qualify for participation (NCAA, 2012).

(5) Division II Athletics – Institutions must sponsor at least five men and five women's sports. Financial aid must be awarded to student-athletes to qualify for this division (NCAA, 2012).

(6) Division III Athletics – Division III is the largest of the three National Collegiate Athletic Association divisions, comprised of 449 institutions. Unlike Divisions I and II, participating student-athletes may not receive athletically related financial aid (NCAA, 2012).

Conclusion

The conflict of sports and academia is complicated, with various factors affecting outcomes. Kerry State University is an institution of higher learning; students partake in activities, programs, and projects that enhance their development. Leaders at Kerry State should understand that participating in athletics is not the reason students enroll. Coaches so consumed with their records can lose sight of the best interests of the student.

Institutions accept and enroll specially admitted student-athletes with the best interests of the athletic department and institution in mind. This study focused on the best interests of the student-athlete. The fundamental purpose of intercollegiate athletics is to enhance the student's experience, not overshadow it (Jolly, 2008).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The upward trend of student-athletes graduating at higher rates continues to capture higher education interest and garner media attention. Over the past few years, student-athletes, as a whole, have outperformed their non-athletic counterparts in the classroom and have graduated more frequently (NCAA, 2012). The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the governing body for intercollegiate athletes and collects data on graduation rates for student-athletes. According to the official NCAA website (2012), the graduation rate for student-athletes at the Division I level is 82%. Higher graduation rates have also been reported for Division II student-athletes when compared to the general student body (NCAA, 2012). Unfortunately, it is unclear if these current trends pertain to Division III student-athletes as graduation rates are not collected and analyzed (Sander, 2009). As a result, sizeable gaps in the research persist regarding student-athlete graduation rates, and programs implemented to ensure the success of the Division III athlete.

Currently, the NCAA requires student-athletes to achieve minimum SAT scores and high school GPAs to enroll at the Division I and II level, and allows Division III institutions to enact their own policies (NCAA, 2012). As a result, Division III institutions are forced to implement their own admissions policies, some of which are detrimental to the vision and core beliefs of the institution. This chapter was designed to explore the literature regarding student-athletes and the challenges they endure during their tenure in college.

The literature review was arranged into themes that describe the various factors associated with student-athletes. In the section titled, *The Evolution of Intercollegiate Athletics*, an analysis of the history of intercollegiate athletics and the background literature regarding the

foundation of the NCAA is provided. The next section, titled *Admissions Policies*, describes the shift in the admissions policies implemented at many institutions around the country and how these changes affect student-athletes. In the next section, titled *Student Engagement and Success*, the issues of division, sport, gender, and ethnicity are examined to explore how well student-athletes are performing in the classroom. The last section is titled *Academic Support* and outlines how student-athletes are a unique group on college campuses requiring special attention.

The Evolution of Intercollegiate Athletics

Although intercollegiate athletics is present in other countries, nowhere else in the world has participating in sports had such a profound impact as in the United States. Today, approximately 400,000 college students participate in NCAA athletic programs (NCAA, 2012). Higher education institutions spend massive amounts of money to ensure student-athletes have access to the best coaches, facilities, and equipment. It is a complicated process for colleges and universities to provide a high quality education combined with high-level athletic programs (Fried, 2007).

In the early nineteenth century, students on college campuses participated in communal organizations that allowed for competition amongst one another. At some institutions, competition consisted of a game similar to what would now be considered rugby, where most often the sophomore class would overwhelm the freshman class (Smith, 2005). The widespread use of the railroad in the mid nineteenth century allowed for the commencement of intercollegiate athletics. Many of the early competitions were held between Ivy League institutions, with the first recorded event being a crew match between Harvard in Yale in 1852 (Smith, 2005). Neither team had a coach or a training regimen. In front of a crowd of about one thousand, Harvard beat Yale by about four lengths. The victory brought great notoriety to

Harvard. Later in the 1850s, many Ivy League schools organized crew teams to compete with Harvard (Smith, 2005). The popularity of intercollegiate athletics also provided unforeseen challenges for colleges.

By the mid to late nineteenth century, competitions in baseball, football, track and field, tennis, ice hockey, and gymnastics, were underway on college campuses across the country. The first football game between Princeton and Rutgers took place on November 6, 1869 in New Brunswick, New Jersey (Thelin, 1994). The game resembled more of a rugby-style competition, unlike the football game people are presently accustomed to viewing. Many institutions in the years that followed added football to their list of varsity sports. The game's brutal nature resulted in injuries and even fatalities. In 1905 alone, 18 football players were killed and 149 seriously injured during exhibitions across the country (Crowley, 2006). As a result, many college presidents called for the abolishment of football (Hawes, 1999).

The nation's 26th president, Theodore Roosevelt, was an avid sports fan and was particularly fond of football. After the President's son broke his nose in a football game at Harvard, Roosevelt was encouraged to act (Thelin, 1994). Wanting to reform the system to ensure the safety of student-athletes, Roosevelt held a two-day conference. The conference consisted of college athletic leaders, many with aspirations of ameliorating the system. The meeting resulted in the formation of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (currently named the National Collegiate Athletic Association) in 1905 and founded by 62 members. In the beginning, the members discussed important topics related to athletics and implemented changes. The primary objective of the NCAA over the next forty or so years was to promote athletic championships. The first NCAA national championship was conducted for track and field in 1921 (Hawes, 1999).

Athletic competitions in the United States really gained traction during the 1920s and intercollegiate athletics was no exception. Sporting events were largely unregulated and very chaotic, as the NCAA was not large enough to regulate every college and university athletic program (Hawes, 1999). Athletic competitions drew thousands of businessmen, boosters, alumni, and interest groups. With alternative motives, these groups provided incentives for student-athletes to perform well, and sometimes perform poorly. This led to point-shaving schemes and the illegal betting of competitions. After several congressional hearings, and the American Counsel of Education failing to develop a comprehensive plan to tackle the issue, power was given to the NCAA to regulate the system. However, the NCAA lacked a way to implement rules and regulations to halt corruption. Intercollegiate athletics continued to expand during the 1930s and 1940s and so too did the wide-spread use of gambling and the fixing of contests (Hawes, 1999).

Wide-spread corruption led the NCAA to adopt the Sanity Code, which was based on five principles (Brown, 1999). The first was a clear distinction that college athletes were amateurs. The other four incorporated restrictions on recruiting, financial aid and scholarship limits, academic standards, and institutional responsibility. Shortly after developing the Sanity Code, the United States entered World War II and the implementation of its principles was halted. After failing to gain the required support for the Sanity Code after the war, intercollegiate athletics remained largely unregulated. In August of 1951, the NCAA council modified the Sanity Code and developed a 12-point code that focused on how to enforce the changes (Brown, 1999).

Legislative Changes

Several landmark decisions during the 1970s significantly changed the intercollegiate athletic landscape. At the NCAA Convention in 1973, the Council adopted the 2.0 Standard and abolished the previous 1.6 Standard. The new standard required student-athletes to maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0 (NCAA, 2012). Later that year, the Council reorganized the competitive environment and separated athletic programs into three distinct categories; Division I, II, and III. This changed the competitive structure for colleges and forced athletic departments to evaluate their school's philosophy on the type of programs they would offer. The major sports programs were deemed Division I, medium sized programs Division II, and the smaller programs Division III (Lawry, 2005).

Division I institutions must offer at least 14 athletic programs, seven for men and seven for women, or six for men and eight for women. Each Division I institutions must offer a men and women's sport in the fall, winter, and spring. There are 335 Division I institutions (NCAA, 2012). Division II institutions must offer at least 10 athletic programs, five for men and five for women, or four for men and six for women. Division II must also offer a men and women's sport in the fall, winter, and spring. There are 288 Division II institutions (NCAA, 2012). Division I and II have the ability to offer financial aid and scholarships based on a student's athletic abilities. Division III represents the largest number of institutions, 447. These institutions are not required to offer a certain number of sports and are not permitted to offer scholarships based on athletic abilities (NCAA, 2012).

Another landmark decision, Title IX, was passed into law in 1972 providing equal opportunities for female athletes. It took over two years for the NCAA to determine how the act would be enforced (NCAA, 2012). Title IX made significant changes to the way athletic

departments handled women's athletic affairs. As a result, colleges began offering more women's sports and more financial assistance to women athletes, stating that budgets for men and women needed to be comparable. By 1982, women's sports consisted of five national championships, including basketball, field hockey, swimming, tennis and volleyball. Additional women's championships were introduced throughout the decade (NCAA, 2012).

In 1983, the NCAA passed Proposition 48, requiring student-athletes to possess a minimum 2.0 GPA and 700 SAT score (NCAA, 2012). While some believed that Proposition 48 was absolutely needed, others argued that the ruling adversely affected lower income and certain minority groups from participating in intercollegiate athletics. It is estimated that Proposition 48 adversely affected African-American student-athletes ten times more than white student-athletes (Meyer, 2005). Proposition 42 was passed by the NCAA in 1989 and required Division I and II student-athletes to meet Proposition 48's minimum requirements to receive financial assistance. Student-athletes with scores lower than the minimum were forbidden to receive scholarship money (NCAA, 2012). Many African American coaches, including legendary Georgetown basketball coach John Thompson, felt the decision unfairly discriminated against black athletes. Proposition 42 was later rescinded in 1990 (Hawes, 1999). The use of minimum standardized test scores remains a contentious issue today (Lawry, 2005). Proposition 48 and 42 did not affect Division III student-athletes since they are not permitted by the NCAA to receive financial assistance and institutions are permitted to enact their own admissions policies.

On August 1, 2003, the NCAA implemented a 40, 60, 80 rule for Division I athletes. The rule states, to stay eligible, students must complete 40% of their degree by the end of their second year, 60% by the end of their third year, and 80% by the end of their fourth year. Prior to this, the NCAA policy was 25, 50, and 75 (NCAA, 2012). This policy forces Division I athletic

departments to ensure student-athletes are working to graduate. Since the passing of the 40, 60, 80 rule, graduation rates have continually increased for Division I athletes (NCAA, 2012). No such policy for Division III exists, as progress toward graduation for student-athletes is not recorded and analyzed. In 2009, the Division III Presidents Council approved a two-year pilot program to begin calculating graduation rates for Division III student-athletes (NCAA, 2012).

Shift in Admissions Policies

Over the last few decades, a transition occurred in the admissions policies implemented by an overwhelming majority of institutions (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). In the 1950s, the emphasis of admissions departments revolved around recruiting well-rounded students that possessed an assortment of attributes. These policies required all students to partake in diverse leadership positions that enhanced their skills and abilities. Institutions utilized these policies to ensure that the student body consisted of a population ready to confront the many challenges of higher education (Shulman & Bowen, 2001).

A dramatic shift in policy took place in the 1970s. Institutions began implementing admissions policies focused on recruiting well-rounded classes, rather than well-rounded individuals. The shift in policies encouraged students to hone their skills in particular domains, rather than in multiple areas. One of the groups greatly affected by these policies was student-athletes. The focus was shifted from being well-rounded in a number of areas to being excellent in a particular area (Shulman & Bowen, 2001).

Wishing to gain preferential admissions treatment, student-athletes expend hundreds of hours practicing to develop and refine their skills, as they are cognizant of the performance needed to garner attention from college coaches. At all levels, the recruitment process for

intercollegiate athletics is extremely competitive (Sigelman, 1995). Many student-athletes have aspirations of performing on the highest stages in front of the largest crowds.

Regardless of the level, intercollegiate athletics is extremely demanding on both the coach and athlete. Coaches recruit student-athletes firmly committed to developing their skills and improving the team's performance. Coaches are compensated for producing winning teams, recruiting and enrolling student-athletes to help achieve success (Adler & Adler, 1985). The objective of athletic programs is two-fold; win and ensure academic success for players.

Problems arise when coaches implement win-at-all costs systems that focus too heavily on athletic demands, and not enough on academics. Student-athletes are students first and attend institutions of higher learning to develop their skills and prepare them for their desired profession (Watt & Moore, 2001).

As a result of the emphasis to produce winning teams, athletes are a priority for America's institutions. Comprising about 15-20% of the overall population on college campuses, student-athletes at all levels enjoy favorable treatment in the admissions process (Eckard, 2010). For example, Suggs (1999) found student-athletes at Amherst College stood a greater chance of gaining admissions than their non-athletic counterparts. Amherst is ranked as one of the premier liberal arts colleges in the country, and rates applicants using a one to five point scale; top students receiving a one and the lowest receiving a five. During a ten-year span from 1989-1998, Suggs (1999) found that Amherst rejected every applicant with a score of five. General students with a four rating had a five percent chance of receiving admission and students with a three had a 9.7 percent chance. Interestingly, student-athletes with a four rating had a 33 percent chance of gaining admission and athletes with a three had a 48.2 percent chance (Suggs, 1999). Student-athletes in the study were undoubtedly favored during the admissions process.

A similar longitudinal study by Purdy, Eitzen, and Hufnagel (1982) finds student-athletes to possess consistently lower academic scores than the general student population. The Purdy et al. (1982) study analyzes the academic prowess of over two thousand student-athletes at Colorado State University. The study examines the high school and university records of every student-athlete enrolled at CSU over a 10-year span ranging from the fall of 1970 to the spring of 1980. The study reveals that CSU student-athletes were admitted with lower academic scores and received favorable admissions treatment. Accounting for 33 percent of the Purdy et al. (1982) study, football and basketball players were the least prepared and enrolled with the lowest high school GPAs and SAT scores.

Student-athletes of varying sports are often admitted with SAT scores 50-100 points below the general student population (Sigelman, 1995). In his study of 99 Division I football programs, Sigelman finds the mean SAT score of scholarship players to be 165 points below the average incoming freshman. The Sigelman study reveals that the best performing football programs had the largest sizable gap amongst the general student population and scholarship football players.

A 1998 NCAA-funded study on the effects of participating in intercollegiate athletics, the American Institutes for Research finds college athletes to have lower GPAs, and more psychological and physical problems than other students also participating in extracurricular activities (Long & Caudill, 1991). The study also finds student-athletes to have more drug and alcohol-related issues. Interestingly, student-athletes in the study were less likely to accept leadership roles outside of athletics (Long & Caudill, 1991).

Student-Athlete Engagement and Success

The interaction a student has with the institution is a critical component to the successful completion of a college degree. There is substantial evidence that students, including student-athletes, benefit from educationally stimulating activities and are more likely to graduate (Astin, 1985; Kuh, 1995; Tinto, 1975). Gayles and Hu (2009), write, “engagement has positive and significant impacts on a set of college outcomes for student-athletes, suggesting that college athletes can benefit from increased college engagement in ways similar to the general student population” (p. 329).

Student learning and development are closely tied to students participating in educationally meaningful activities (Wolf-Wendel, et al., 2009). There are multiple variables to examine when discussing student engagement and success as it relates to college athletics. This section is broken into three parts and seeks to evaluate the role that sport (including division), gender, and ethnicity play in the academic success of student-athletes.

Division and sport. The sport that a student-athlete participates in plays a significant role in determining the likelihood that the athlete will graduate. There are multiple variables to consider and the student success rates vary greatly by division and institution. While discussing student-athlete success, it is imperative to understand the significant difference between divisions. For a student-athlete to enroll at a Division I institution, he/she must meet NCAA standards. The NCAA allows Division III institutions to enact their own admissions policies. As a result, student-athletes at the Division III level can be accepted with lower scores (usually specially admitted) than students at the Division I level.

Division I programs have the ability to offer full scholarships and are mandated by the NCAA to provide academic support to student-athletes (Graham, 2012). Conversely, Division

III, is not permitted to offer athletic scholarships and the amount of support varies by institution. Division I institutions also have larger support staffs, thus increasing the stimulating programs and activities offered (Gayles & Hu, 2009).

The trajectory of graduation rates for Division I and II athletes has steadily increased over the past few years as more emphasis is placed on educational outcomes. In 2011, the NCAA reported the single-year graduation success rates (GSR) at 82 percent for Division I student-athletes who began their college career in 2004. These figures are the highest ever recorded for Division I athletes. These figures also state that athletes are graduating at higher levels than their non-athletic counterparts (NCAA, 2012). It is unclear if Division III athletes are also graduating at record high levels.

Although the GSR for Division I athletes is the highest ever, it is important to note that high profile sports (particularly football and basketball) have significantly lower graduation rates than that of the general student-athlete body (Graham, 2012). Football and basketball were the only two sports to have less than 70 percent of their players graduate (NCAA, 2012). It is not clear if these trends pertain to football and basketball players at the Division III level.

In 2011, there were 425 NCAA Division III institutions, each with their own vision for athletics. Each institution is permitted to implement their own admissions policies, creating unique challenges (Tobin, 2005). Students ill-equipped to handle the demands of higher education can have negative consequences on themselves and the institution. For example, the Laden, Matranga, and Peltier (1999) study analyzes 465 specially admitted students at the University of Nevada, Reno from 1987-1990. The study of specially admitted students involves students receiving preferential admissions treatment, including minorities, athletes, and fine and performing arts students. The one commonality amongst the students was they were admitted

with a 2.3 GPA or lower. As of 1995, the Laden et al. (1999) study reveals the graduation rate for the specially admitted students was only 23.4%. Of the 465 students in the study, 356 did not graduate. Of the students not graduating, 141 were suspended for academic reasons and 215 left voluntarily (Laden et al., 1999). Although the study involves students outside of athletics and was conducted over 15 years ago, it provides evidence that many of the specially admitted students at a Division III institution did not have the tools and/or academic support to graduate.

Another study of student-athletes receiving preferential admissions treatment and academically underperforming takes place in Purdy et al. (1982) study. Only three percent of the student-athletes enrolled with lower than a 2.5 GPA graduated. Interestingly, the student-athletes receiving the largest amount of scholarship money in the Purdy et al. (1982) study were also the least prepared, and performed the worst once enrolled at CSU. The Purdy et al. (1982) takes place before the NCAA began tracking graduation rates; however it provides additional evidence that students with lower admission scores have a difficult time graduating.

The Purdy et al. (1982) and Laden et al. (1999) studies are imperative for Division III athletics. Abiding by the NCAA regulations of ensuring that student-athletes are advancing toward graduation, many Division I and II athletic programs hire academic support. Without the means of hiring support, Division III institutions may be doing a disservice to specially admitted student-athletes.

Ethnicity and student success. Although the graduation rates for Division I student-athletes have steadily improved over the past few years (and is higher than the general student population) there are ethnicity issues worthy of further analysis (NCAA, 2012). For white student-athletes the overall GSR in 2011 was 87 percent and for African-Americans it was 68 percent. For white males, the GSR was 83 percent and for African-American males it was 62

percent (NCAA, 2012). The difference in graduation rates can be attributed to numerous variables including socio-economic status, preparedness, and commitment to academics (Videon, 2002). African-American students, on average, enter college with lower academic scores than white student-athletes (Cross, 2002). Multiple studies have concluded that students accepted with lower academic scores also graduate at lower levels (Laden et al., 1999; Purdy et al., 1982). It is unknown if such a huge discrepancy exists between whites and African-American student-athletes at the Division III level.

In 2002, The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (JBHE) reported that there are over 20,000 African-American student-athletes receiving either full or partial scholarships to participate in intercollegiate athletics (Cross, 2002). The scholarship students in the report were more likely than their non-athletic counterparts to graduate. Cross (2002) writes, “An athletic scholarship greatly increases the chances of earning a degree for both black women and black men” (p. 36). The financial incentives combined with the academic support are believed to contribute to the higher graduation rates (Cross, 2002). Since Division III student-athletes are not permitted to receive athletic scholarship, it is unknown if African-American student-athletes at this level are graduating at higher levels than their non-athletic counterparts.

Several studies have indicated that African-American youths participate in higher levels than their white counterparts; other studies have shown no significant difference. Very few studies have addressed the participation rates of Hispanics, Asians, and Native American in intercollegiate athletics (Videon, 2002). It is clear that additional research is needed to understand how participating in intercollegiate athletics affects the success rates of various ethnic groups.

Gender and student success. Both men and women participating in Division I athletics are graduating at higher levels than their non-athletic counterparts (NCAA, 2012). Studies have also shown intercollegiate athletes to have higher self-esteem, GPAs, attendance records, and earnings post-graduation (Videon, 2002). As opportunities for females to participate in intercollegiate athletics have expanded, it is clear that these benefits are affecting a greater portion of the population.

Passed into law in 1972, Title IX has granted female athletes more opportunities to participate in intercollegiate athletics (Videon, 2002). Although the effects of participating in sports are generally viewed as positive, female athletes may have more to gain from participation than their male counterparts. Videon (2002) writes, “sports opportunities for girls have expanded in recent years, and gender stereotypes have loosened, leading us to believe that the benefits of participation in sports for girls may be stronger now than they were a decade or two ago” (p. 423).

Participating in intercollegiate athletics can have dramatic effects on the personal development of female athletes. Videon (2002), writes that females competing in athletics, “may place a greater emphasis on improving one’s own ability, cooperation, and feeling good, which lead to greater character development” (p. 421). These skills are greatly beneficial for women in any college setting and future endeavor.

The overall GSR for Division I female athletes is considerably higher than their male counterparts. The six year graduate rate for the cohorts from 2001-2004 GSR was 88 percent for female athletes, while the GSR for the same cohort of male athletes was 73 percent (NCAA, 2012). As previously discussed, football and men’s basketball programs, as a whole, are graduating their players at less than 70 percent. This is one of the main reasons for such a large

difference in graduation rates among genders. It is unclear if Division III female athletes are also graduating at a higher percentage than male athletes.

Academic Support of Student-Athletes

The student-athlete experience is vastly different and significantly more structured when compared to the general student body (Jolly, 2008). Student-athletes have more parameters about when courses can be taken because of training regiments and practice and meeting schedules. To remain eligible student-athletes need to retain full-time status and carry a minimum of 12 credits (NCAA, 2012). Most student-athletes routinely carry at least 15 credit hours (Jolly, 2008). Student-athletes have the difficult task of juggling academic coursework combined with athletic schedules. Their participation in athletics limits the amount of time available for completing academic work and studying for exams. As a result, student-athletes have increased academic, social, physical, personal, and emotional challenges (Watson & Kissinger, 2007). Less than 30% of NCAA institutions hire specialists that understand the challenges student-athletes endure (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2006).

The Watson and Kissinger (2007) study examines the overall wellness of 157 undergraduate students, 62 student-athletes and 95 nonathletes. The 5F-Wel was utilized to assess the participant's wellness. The 5F-Wel includes 73 items that gauge the participant's social self, essential self, creative self, physical self, and coping self. The Watson and Kissinger (2007) study reveals that nonathletes scored higher on 22 of the 23 wellness factors analyzed. The lone exception where athletes scored better than nonathletes was in the exercise factor. Nonathletes scored significantly higher on social self and essential self than did the athletes. The results suggest that student-athletes may be lacking in the area of their sense of meaning and purpose in life (Watson & Kissinger, 2007).

Over the past few decades, a significant modification has occurred in the counseling of student-athletes. Prior to the 1970s, the advising of student-athletes consisted mainly of class scheduling, time management, and academic tutoring (Broughton & Neyer, 2001). In the mid to late 1970s, college administrators began viewing student-athletes as a unique population with a distinct set of challenges. In 1975, The National Association of Advisors for Athletes (N4A) was established to provide academic and personal support for student-athletes. The N4A suggested that academic advisors maintain eligibility and graduation rates (Broughton & Neyer, 2001).

Despite the efforts to improve eligibility and graduation rates, there are additional concerns that advisors should consider to sufficiently meet the needs of the student-athlete. For example, the life skills development approach focuses on drug and alcohol education, interpersonal communication skills, time management, career development, and appropriate sexual relationships. Life development skills equip the student-athlete with tools to ensure they are prepared to handle the demands of higher education (Broughton & Neyer, 2001). Another approach developed by Pinkerton, Hinz, and Barrow (1989), examines the personal and psychological problems facing student-athletes. Problems include identity conflict, fear of success/failure, social isolation, poor athletic performance, academic problems, drug or alcohol problems, career-related concerns, interpersonal relationships, and athletic injuries (Pinkerton, Hinz, & Barrow, 1989).

The implementation of effective retention plans vary, however the most successful have placed an emphasis on assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, and reformation. Colleges and universities that implement more comprehensive retention programs have higher graduation rates for student-athletes (Person & LeNoir, 1997). Terenzini and Pascarella (1980) write, "It would appear that systemic efforts to promote student retention may need to be flexible

and varied; what works for one student may not for another” (p. 282). This statement is crucial for student-athletes as programs need to vary to meet the needs of this diverse group.

Institutions should vary their programs to support the cultural backgrounds of the student-athlete. For example, African American students perform better in the classroom with the implementation of academic support programs that focus on integration. The more attached and supported the African American students feel on campus, the more likely they are to succeed (Person & LeNoir, 1997).

In a study of 31 African American student-athletes at 11 different institutions, Person & LeNoir (1997) found that retention is greater for those involved in a summer program or mentor system. The Person & LeNoir (1997) study reveals the importance of social interaction with faculty and administration. The researchers find that classroom performance was closely tied to the students’ level of comfort and satisfaction in the environment. The students involved in the two largest revenue generating sports, basketball and football, in the Person & LeNoir (1997) study graduated at fewer than fifty percent, despite receiving specialized academic support. The researchers believe summer programs that focus on academic, cultural, career-development, and service learning may be needed for many of the African American students on college campuses (Person & LeNoir, 1997).

Conclusion

Over the last 150 years, intercollegiate athletics have evolved tremendously. What started as competitive games among local colleges has led to a system allowing students to travel the country competing against teams from all 50 states (Hawes, 1999). With the advent of the National Collegiate Athletic Association in the early 20th century, intercollegiate athletics took shape, and produced congruent rules and regulations for schools to follow. Although there are

still contentious issues that affect intercollegiate athletics, many of the earlier problems have been diminished to produce a system where athletes are permitted to enjoy intercollegiate athletics while earning a degree (Hawes, 1999).

The NCAA enacted standards for Division I and II student-athletes and institutions, and allows Division III programs to implement their own policies. As a result, Division III colleges and universities are placed in a difficult predicament of how to ensure the academic success of student-athletes. It is the role of the academic institution to determine how to implement policies that will make certain the success of all students. The objective for athletic programs should focus on ensuring that student-athletes are excelling in the classroom and being prepared for life after graduation. It is a major disservice to the student-athlete when athletic departments focus solely on wins and losses, and maintaining a student's eligibility.

Student-athletes are a unique group on college campuses that endure specific challenges. These challenges include trying to be the best on the playing field, while performing well in the classroom. The role of the academic institution is to ensure that student-athletes are receiving the academic support needed to perform well academically. It is often counterproductive for Division III institutions to accept and enroll students with inferior scores and not provide the academic support to succeed.

Chapter III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges that specially admitted student-athletes endure as they navigate their educational experiences. This study was guided by Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) second edition of *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. I used a two-phase, explanatory sequential mixed methods design to obtain quantitative data before crafting a qualitative phase that permitted further analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova et al., 2006).

In the first phase, quantitative phase of the study, a questionnaire was administered to the previous five classes (2007-2011) of specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State University. The second phase, qualitative phase of the study, used standardized open-ended interviews to explore the perceptions of those involved with the special admit system (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Seidman, 2006). This study was certainly warranted, as there are so few mixed methods studies pertaining to Division III athletics (Robst & Keil, 2000). My findings and analysis were developed as a result of both phases. The study is driven by four research questions:

1. What challenges do specially admitted student-athletes encounter at Kerry State University as they navigate their academic experiences?
2. What support systems are currently in place to aid student-athletes as they enroll and advance toward graduation at Kerry State University?
3. In what ways do the challenges specially admitted student-athletes endure help to explain the academic standing of these students?
4. What significant themes emerged as a result of this mixed methods research project?

Assumption and Rationale for Mixed Methods Research

A mixed methods approach is a distinctive way to design a study that includes collecting, analyzing, and combining quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, et al., 2006). Mixed methods research designs are more comprehensive than simply using both phases (Bryman, 2006; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Mixed methods research can be defined as “the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts, or language into a single study” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). Mixed methods designs offer an alternative to single method approaches (Jang, McDougall, Pollon, Herbert, & Russell, 2008). This design offers flexibility and creativity (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) and allows the researcher to further understand the problem and fully answer the study’s research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

As a relatively new approach, mixed methods research allows for “multiple ways of making sense of the social world, and multiple standpoints on what is important and to be valued and cherished” (Greene, 2008, p. 20). In mixed methods designs, quantitative and qualitative phases complement each other using numeric and narrative data to provide a more thorough analysis of the research problem (Ivankova, et al., 2006; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). “Mixed methods research provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 12). Mixed methods approaches are needed when neither quantitative nor qualitative approaches are sufficient enough by themselves to fully understand the research problem (Ivankova, et al., 2006). The mixed methods design was clearly warranted for this research project to understand the complex phenomenon that is the special admit system used at Kerry State University.

Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Study

To better understand the many obstacles specially admitted student-athletes cope with as they juggle athletics and academics, I used an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design. The purpose of this design is to, “use a qualitative strand to explain initial quantitative results” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 82). This design was essential for this research project because results from one of the phases were not enough to fully comprehend the special admit system and academic standing of the specially admitted student-athletes. This research design allowed me to analyze quantitative results before collecting rich, thick qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The figure below (Figure 1) graphically displays the sequence of events in an explanatory mixed methods study.

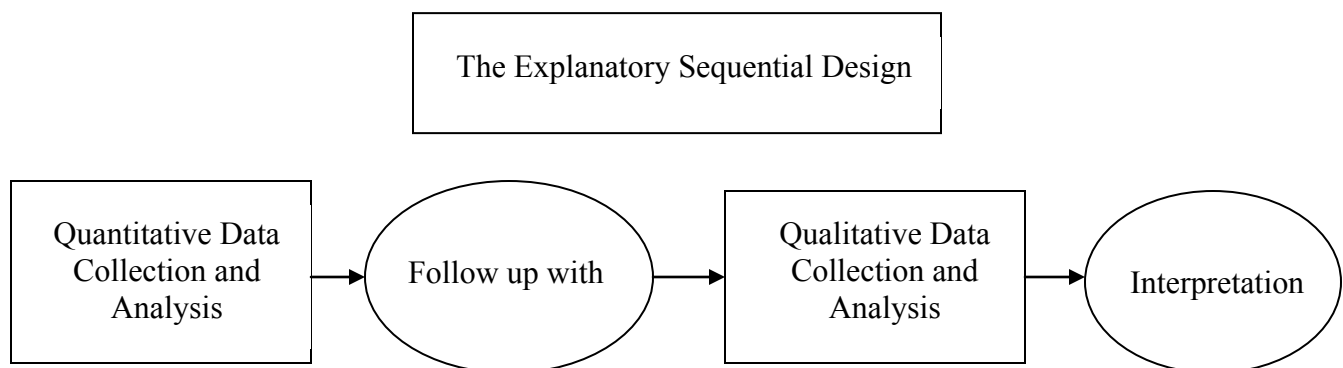


Figure 1. The Explanatory Sequential Design. Adapted from “Prototypical Versions of the Six Major Mixed Methods Research Designs,” by Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 69.

The explanatory sequential mixed methods design allowed me to collect academic (College GPAs and Enrolment Status) data first (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). These data were collected and analyzed to explore the current academic standing of specially admitted student-athletes. After analyzing the academic standing of the sample population, a questionnaire was crafted to gather the perceptions of specially admitted student-athletes. These data were not enough to fully answer the research

questions and a qualitative strand was needed to better understand how these student-athletes navigate their educational experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Prior to this study, there were unanswered questions regarding the effectiveness of a system that allows student-athletes to enroll at a Division III institution with inferior high school academic scores. The explanatory sequential research design allowed me to survey specially admitted student-athletes to gather initial data regarding the challenges that participants endure (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). These data served as the foundation for this study and helped to craft the qualitative phase, which was given precedence in this study (Creswell, 2007). It was unclear if specially admitted student athletes were excelling at Kerry State University, or if large numbers of these students were unsuccessful in their academic endeavors.

After collecting and analyzing the quantitative data, I used a qualitative phase to gather information about the services that are available to these student-athletes and ways in which they interact with these services. The qualitative phase was designed to further understand the programming in place to aid specially admitted student-athletes as they progress or fail to progress toward graduation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). It also allowed me to ascertain the perceptions of not only specially admitted student-athletes, but those that work closely with this population. The research phenomena will be described using the participants' subjective point of view.

Strategy of Inquiry: Case Study

To further understand the special admit program at Kerry State, I employed a within-site case study approach (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). Yin (1981) writes that case studies, "provide

an accurate rendition of the facts, some consideration of these facts, and a conclusion based on the single explanation that appears congruent with the facts” (p.61). This approach was used to further understand the special admit system and the challenges the student-athletes endure while enrolled at Kerry State. The rationale for the within-site case study approach was to add to the literature pertaining to student-athletes at the Division III level). Yin (2003) writes, “A case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomenon” (p. 1).

The case study approach allows the researcher to use various data collection procedures to better understand a phenomenon. Yin (2003) believes that an important component to using a case study approach is that it allows the researcher to use multiple sources of evidence. Yin (2003) writes, “any finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information” (p. 98). The case study approach in this project allowed me to uncover specific themes based on several different data collection procedures.

Research Site

Kerry State University (pseudonym being used to protect the actual institution and the student-athletes involved in this study) is located in the Mid-Atlantic Region and was founded in the early 1900s as a public (state-funded) institution. Currently, the institution offers over 80 undergraduate degrees in business, education, fine and performing arts, liberal arts and sciences, communication, and engineering. The Carnegie Classification for Kerry State University is M4/R-Medium (four-year, primarily residential). Kerry State employs about 1,300 employees and enrolls about 8,500 undergraduate students and 2,500 graduate students.

Roughly 5-10% of Kerry State students compete in the institution's Division III varsity athletic programs. There are 18 Division III sports offered, 8 for men and 10 for women. Sports for men include baseball, basketball, cross-country, football, soccer, swimming, track and field. Sports for women include basketball, cross-country, field hockey, lacrosse, soccer, softball, swimming, volleyball, track and field. As a Division III institution, Kerry State is not permitted to offer athletic based scholarships (NCAA, 2012).

Kerry State University was an ideal institution for this research project and was purposefully selected for two reasons. It is a medium sized Division III institution offering a wide variety of athletic programs. It is also an institution where I had access to the admissions scores of each of the 199 specially admitted student-athletes from 2007-2011. Before embarking on this research journey, permission (Appendix F) to collect data from participants was secured (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) through Kerry State University's Institutional Research Board (IRB). This process included completing the IRB application and receiving approval from the dissertation chair and committee.

Participant Selection

Annually, the Kerry State University Athletic Department is permitted to specially admit about 50 student-athletes. This study collected data from specially admitted student athletes that enrolled at Kerry State from 2007-2011 (n=199). The students at the center of this research project are the quintessential Division III athletes, receiving no financial assistance for their athletic abilities (NCAA, 2012). These students participate in intercollegiate athletics simply because they enjoy the competitive environment it provides (Robst & Keil, 2000). Students in the study are involved in campus-wide clubs and organizations and hold part-time jobs both on and off-campus.

The student-athletes in this study are enrolled in most majors offered by the institution; the one exception is engineering. The engineering program is the most competitive offered by Kerry State and incoming students must excel in higher-level math and science courses in high school. As a result, specially admitted student-athletes do not possess the grades and SAT scores to enroll in engineering.

Each team within the Athletic Department is allotted a certain number of special admits, based on the number of participants on the team. For example, women's lacrosse team is allowed to use three special admits a year, while the football team is permitted to use about ten. This study exclusively examines specially admitted student-athletes and those involved with the special admit system. It does not include student-athletes that met general admission requirements or students that participate in club or intramural sports. Participants were specially admitted at Kerry State because they failed to meet general admissions standards.

Although Kerry State is a Division III institution, it uses the NCAA admissions policies adopted by Division II colleges and universities. The NCAA (2012) admissions standards for participating Division II institutions require student-athletes to possess a minimum 820 SAT score and 2.0 cumulative high school GPA. Students that fail to meet these minimum requirements are not afforded admission to Kerry State University, regardless of athletic ability. It is unclear why Kerry State uses these particular standards as a baseline for student-athletes.

For the quantitative phase, I included every specially admitted student-athlete over a five year (2007-2011) span. The sampling method employed for this phase was convenience and nonprobabilistic. Data was collected from specially admitted student-athletes willing and available to participate (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The convenience sampling was used because I was only interested in learning about this one particular program at Kerry State

(Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). At the conclusion of this project, I will not make generalizations about other specially admitted student-athletes at other Division III institutions.

Five classes of specially admitted student-athletes were chosen because it generated enough students to thoroughly research the program. Five years of student data provided an accurate portrayal of the special admit system and the challenges students endure. Analyzing five classes of students also eliminated any potential biases existing among the various academic years being studied. Studying the system over a five year period provided more accurate data of the success, or lack thereof, of the program.

For the qualitative phase, student-athletes willing to participate in an interview were included. Several student-athletes, both male and female, from each of the five classes were interviewed. I employed an intensity sampling technique for this phase of the study (Patton, 2002). This sampling technique allowed me to seek, “excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, but not highly unusual cases” (Patton, 2002, p. 234). Student-athletes were selected to provide descriptive accounts of their experiences at Kerry State.

Also included in the qualitative phase were the coaches and administrators that work closely with student-athletes on campus. This group included coaches, athletic administrators, and admissions personnel. Again, an intensity sampling technique was used to ascertain information that explains in great detail the many facets of the special admit program (Patton, 2002). Collecting data from the extreme or highly unusual cases was not a focal point in this project. Interviewing this population allowed me to further my knowledge of the program and better understand the phenomenon. From this group of athletic personnel, I ascertained imperative information about strategies implemented to aid student-athletes as they navigate their educational experiences.

Phases of Data Collection

This mixed method research project occurred in two distinct phases. The research design for this study involved “first collecting and analyzing quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2009, p. 304). The first phase of this study is quantitative and used institutional research to obtain the academic standing of the 199 specially admitted student-athletes. After obtaining the academic standing of participants, I administered a survey to every specially admitted student-athlete that enrolled at Kerry State between 2007 and 2011.

The second phase is qualitative and was used to further explore the challenges that specially admitted student-athletes endure as they progress toward graduation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The data collection for this research project is fixed as the quantitative and qualitative procedures have been predetermined (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The qualitative phase of this research project was given priority (Creswell, 2007).

Prior to conducting the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study, research instruments were piloted prior to the commencement of each data collection phase. Piloting the research instruments help determine the practicality of each being used (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011). Each research instrument was piloted with students and Kerry State staff that were not involved in the actual study. “A pilot study is a stage of your project in which you collect a small amount of data to test drive your procedures in your data collection protocol, and set the stage for your actual study” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011, p. 203).

Phase 1: Quantitative. To better understand the current academic standing of the specially admitted student-athletes, the first phase of the research project is quantitative. I collaborated with the Assistant Director of Admissions that works directly with the athletic department to obtain the list of approximately 40 student-athletes that needed a special admit to enroll each year at Kerry State between 2007 and 2011. This phase only included specially admitted student-athletes. Therefore, the sample population for this phase consisted of 199 student-athletes that failed to meet general admission standards. The lists obtained from the Assistant Director of Admissions contained information regarding the student's sport, high school GPA, and two-part (critical reading and math) SAT score. A convenience sampling method was employed for this phase of the study since all 199 specially admitted student-athletes were included and only those willing and able to participate were included (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

After settling on the target population, I worked with the Kerry State University Institutional Effectiveness, Research and Planning (IERP) Department to obtain the academic standing of the sample population. These data included enrollment status, current GPA, and whether or not these students are on pace to graduate. This information provided a foundation for the academic success of this population and helped to answer the project's third research question, in what ways do the challenges specially admitted student-athletes endure help to explain the academic standing of these students? I also worked with IERP to obtain student email addresses and phone numbers for each participant. After gaining this information from IERP, I used it to email (Appendix A) the electronic questionnaire to every student-athlete in my target population (Dillman, 2000).

The questionnaire was used to gain foundational data about the challenges that participants endure. It also garnered information about their experiences and perceptions. These data assisted in answering the first two research questions. Once this information was obtained, a qualitative strand was crafted to secure reasons for successes and failures (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

It is important to note that when the survey was administered, not all participants were enrolled at Kerry State, as some have transferred, dropped out, or withdrawn from taking courses. I did not expect all participants to be actively taking classes or currently checking their Kerry State student email account. After administering the initial survey, three reminder emails were sent to participants. Since many of the participants are no longer enrolled, it was determined that the best way to ascertain the information on the survey was by contacting them via telephone calls. This helped decrease the potential biases that may have been uncovered as a result of those that return the questionnaire. This also added to the validity of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The last item of the questionnaire asks student-athletes if they would be willing to participate in a 30-minute interview.

Phase 2: Qualitative. Explanatory mixed methods studies are designed to collect and analyze quantitative data before implementing the qualitative phase (Ivankova et al., 2006). An interview protocol based on quantitative findings was crafted to better understand the challenges that specially admitted student-athletes endure during their tenure at Kerry State. The interview protocol also allowed for the analysis of support services and ways in which participants interact with these services.

To enhance this research project, I employed an intensity sampling strategy to accurately describe the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). This sampling method provided, “information-rich

cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely” (Patton, 2002, p. 243). This sampling technique allowed me to include specially admitted student-athletes that have used the system and done well; along with others that were not as successful. I purposely selected several of the specially admitted student-athletes from each enrollment class, as well as members from the admissions and athletic offices.

Using an intensity sampling strategy, I selected male and female student-athletes, some of whom possessed laudable academic scores, as well as others who were not as successful in their academic endeavors (Patton, 2002). Some of the student-athletes interviewed are recent graduates of Kerry State. I used standardized open-ended interviews to ascertain the participant’s thoughts and feelings about the current special admit system and challenges they endure (Seidman, 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). These data furthered my understanding of the perceptions of those that used the special admit system to gain access to Kerry State, as well as those that work closely with this population.

Instruments

A mixed methods research project uses various instruments and allows the researcher to further explore a phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The two research instruments being used for this project are a questionnaire and interview protocol. Using multiple data collection instruments helped triangulate findings at the conclusion of this research project (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Prior to conducting each phase of this study, the research instruments were piloted to alleviate potential problems that may have risen during the data collection phases. Piloting, according to Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009), “is a stage of your project in which you collect a small amount of data to test drive your procedures, identify possible problems in your data

collection protocols, and set the stage for your actual study” (p. 203). Piloting helped me assess the research instruments and ensure they were clear and capable of capturing essential information to answer the study’s research questions. For the quantitative phase, the questionnaire was piloted with several student-athletes at Kerry State not included in the actual study. The interview protocol was piloted to general students, as well as professional staff on Kerry State’s campus. (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Slight revisions were made to each research instrument based on feedback from the general admit student-athletes and professional staff. These revisions helped craft research instruments that were valid and reliable, contributing to the credibility of this research project (Toma, 2006).

Phase 1: Quantitative. A questionnaire (Appendix B) was used as the primary tool for collecting quantitative data in this research project. The questionnaire was developed to provide initial data that would assist in answering the project’s research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The questionnaire was submitted to the 199 specially admitted student-athletes that enrolled at Kerry State between 2007 and 2011. The questionnaire was developed with the understanding of the arduous schedules of student-athletes and contained 15 questions (Jolly, 2008). I used Kerry State’s IERP data collection tool to electronically email the survey to the sample population. This allowed student-athletes to complete the questionnaire in a timely manner.

The questionnaire contained 15 items and was used to collect initial information about the specially admitted student-athletes’ academic standing and challenges they endure. The first two closed-ended questions were asked to gather demographic information about participants. The next nine closed-ended questions allowed participants to choose from predetermined responses. This type of questioning allowed me to conveniently compare results and statistically

analyze the data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). These questions asked participants to state the year they enrolled, their academic major, sports played since enrolling, support services used, and eligibility status since enrolling. These portion of the questionnaire also asked students to rate (on a Likert scale from 1-4) their commitment to academics, as well as the commitment of their head coach and university. These questions helped to answer my first three research questions regarding the academic standing of student-athletes, challenges they endure, and support services they utilize.

The next three questions were open-ended and allowed participants to formulate their own responses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). These questions asked students to list their biggest challenge, biggest distraction and identify who or what has been most helpful to their academic progress. Student responses provided a solid foundation to further explore during the qualitative phase and assisted in formulating the interview protocol. The last survey question asked students if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Below is the quantitative matrix used for this portion of the study to link the research questions with the questionnaire.

Table 1

Quantitative Questionnaire Matrix

Research Question (RQ)	Questionnaire Items (QI)		
RQ. 1 Challenges that specially admitted student-athletes encounter at Kerry State University as they navigate their academic experiences	QI. 9 Challenges	QI. 11 Distractions	QI. 12 Personal Commitment
	QI. 14 Kerry State	QI. 15 Qualitative Interviews	
RQ. 2 Support systems currently in place to aid student-athletes as they enroll and advance toward graduation at Kerry State University	QI. 8 Study Hall Program	QI. 10 Academic Support	QI. 13 Head Coach
RQ. 3 In what ways do the challenges specially admitted student-athletes endure help to explain the academic standing of these students?	QI. 3 Enrollment	QI. 4 Retention	QI.15 Qualitative Interview
RQ. 4 Significant themes that emerged as a result of this mixed method project?	QI. 1 Gender	QI. 2 Ethnicity	QI. 7 Eligibility

Phase 2: Qualitative. In line with the explanatory sequential mixed method approach, the interview protocol was developed using the quantitative data collection results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). After collecting and analyzing the quantitative data, I gained a better understanding of the challenges that specially admitted student-athletes endure at Kerry State. This information assisted with the crafting of an interview protocol (Appendix D), designed to further explore those challenges, as well as the

support systems in place, and how student-athletes interact with these systems. The interview protocol (Appendix E) was modified slightly for the interviews with athletic personnel.

Interviewing was used to further my understanding of the phenomenon of student-athletes enrolling at Kerry State with inferior academic scores. This phase was used to enable me to fully answer the research questions. Seidman (2006) states, “Interviewing provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior (p.10). I conducted 20 standardized open-ended interviews over a three-month period beginning and ending in the fall 2013 semester (Seidman, 2006). Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was audio recorded. Questions were open-ended and presented in an unbiased manner (Yin, 2003). The table below is provided to link the interview items to the research questions.

Table 2

Qualitative Interview Matrix

Research Question (RQ)	Interview Items (II)		
RQ. 1 Challenges that specially admitted student-athletes encounter at Kerry State University as they navigate their academic experience	II. 2 Challenges	II. 4 Time Management	II. 6 Athletic Participation
RQ. 2 Support systems currently in place to aid student-athletes as they enroll and advance toward graduation at Kerry State University	II. 3 Academic Support	II. 5 Head Coach	II. 7 Study Hall
RQ. 3 In what ways do the challenges specially admitted student-athletes endure help to explain the academic standing of these students?	II. 2 Challenges		
RQ. 4 Significant themes that emerged as a result of this mixed method project?	II. 8 Institutional Support	II. 9 Community Involvement	

Data Analysis

Conducting mixed methods studies produce results that are “both smooth and jagged, full of certainties alongside possibilities and even surprises” (Greene, 2008, p. 20). Data was collected and analyzed sequentially and independently starting with the quantitative phase (Ivankova et al., 2006). Using multiple data analysis approaches allowed me to triangulate data and develop an in-depth analysis of a special admit system that enrolls student-athletes with lower high school academic scores (Hinchey, 2008).

Phase 1: Quantitative. After collecting foundational data from Kerry State's Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning, I analyzed the sample population's academic standing. I examined the students' high school academic history (SAT score and GPA). Next, I separated students by enrollment class and examined those that (1) graduated, (2) are currently pursuing a degree, and (3) failed to graduate and are no longer pursuing a degree at Kerry State. This provided foundational data for the academic performance of students once enrolled at Kerry State. These data helped answer research question three, in what ways do the challenges specially admitted student-athletes endure help to explain the academic standing of these students.

After analyzing the institutional data regarding the academic standing of the sample population, I began the quantitative analysis phase by converting the raw data from the questionnaire into useful information (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Both descriptive and inferential data analysis techniques were employed to begin to answer the project's research questions. I used descriptive analysis techniques to uncover trends in the data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The goal of descriptive statistical methods is to, "be able to understand the data, detect patterns and relationships, and better communicate the results" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 258).

I conducted a descriptive methodical analysis that measured students' responses to each Likert scale question. These closed-ended questions were used to garner students' perceptions regarding their experience at Kerry State. Results were analyzed and charted into a figure that graphically explains foundational data about students' feelings about their educational experience.

Phase 2: Qualitative. The qualitative phase of this study was used to expand on the quantitative results. This phase was given precedence in this study and used to further explain the special admit system and the academic issues associated with enrolling high school student-athletes with lower academic scores and not supporting them academically (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The qualitative data was obtained from interviews conducted with the specially admitted student-athletes, coaches, and athletic and admissions personnel. The qualitative data analysis phase consisted of two cycles used to bring meaning to the data (Saldana, 2009).

The in vivo method of descriptive coding was used during the first cycle of the qualitative analysis. Saldana (2009) writes this method of coding, “refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record” (p. 74). After transcribing each interview, in vivo coding was used to gather and preserve the language used by participants. In vivo coding helped to capture the perspectives of participants verbatim. This type of coding allowed for further analysis and is especially important for the second cycle of qualitative data analysis (Saldana, 2009). Although in vivo coding is sufficient for certain projects as the sole analysis method, the qualitative phase in this research project required a second cycle of coding.

Second cycle coding methods are, “advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through first cycle methods” (Saldana, 2009, p. 149). Second cycle coding in this project was used to develop common and major themes from the data. Pattern coding allowed me to, “pull together a lot of material into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis” (Saldana, 2009, p. 152). Throughout this cycle of coding, major themes were developed and categorized. The data collected from the qualitative phase helped explain the quantitative results and added to the understanding of issues associated with the special admit system.

Mixing of data. Explanatory mixed method designs require the researcher to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data (Bryman, 2006; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In the mixing phase, sometimes referred to as the interpretation or integration phase of the study, I made sense of the quantitative and qualitative data. The process of mixing data allowed me to analyze and explain results and draw implications (Ivankova et al., 2006).

Data collected from IERP was analyzed to gain a better understanding of the current academic standing of the sample population. After analyzing these data, a questionnaire was submitted to all 199 specially admitted student-athletes to gather information about the challenges these students endure and the support services used by this population. After collecting and analyzing quantitative data, an interview protocol was crafted to further explore the challenges of participants. During the qualitative phase, I interviewed specially admitted student-athletes, coaches, and admissions personnel. This phase was given priority in this research project and used to elaborate on the quantitative results. Lastly, major themes were analyzed along with the quantitative results to answer the research questions and provide an in-depth analysis of the results (Ivankova et al., 2006).

Validation

Prior to collecting data, I gained approval from Kerry State's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct my study (Appendix F). The IRB at Kerry State is comprised of faculty and a community representative. Approval from the IRB was the first step to ensuring the ethical treatment of participants in the study.

Multiple data collection methods were used for this research project to increase validity. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) define validity in mixed methods research as, "employing

strategies that address potential issues in data collection, data analysis, and the interpretations that might compromise the merging or connecting of the quantitative and qualitative strands of the study and the conclusions drawn from the combination” (p. 239). To obtain an accurate illustration of the system being used by student-athletes at Kerry State that failed to meet general admission requirements, I included five years (2007-2011) of specially admitted student-athlete data. This allowed me to obtain a better understanding of the academic standing of participants over five years, rather than relying on one year’s worth of data that may have been skewed. There was great variability within each class of special admits.

Prior to the data collection phases, research instruments were piloted to ensure validity and reliability (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Throughout the research project, data that was collected was closely scrutinized for accuracy. Qualitative data provided greater depth to the challenges that specially admitted student-athletes endure and was given priority (Creswell, 2007). Prior to the start of each interview, I asked students and athletic personnel to sign and date the letter of informed consent (Appendix C). To increase trustworthiness, I recorded interviews and transcribed each verbatim (Yin, 2003). Using multiple data collection methods allowed me to triangulate data and added to the study’s validity (Hinchey, 2008; Yin, 2003).

Role of Researcher

As an employee of Kerry State University, it was essential that I separated myself from my normal duties on campus while conducting this study. During the project, I was also a volunteer in the athletic department, so it was essential that I distinguished myself as a researcher. I established a rapport with each participant and tried to make them feel comfortable. This was done by asking about their semester or season. Prior to the start of each interview, I relayed to participants that their identification would not be revealed at any point and their

answers were completely confidential. This helped participants speak candidly about their experiences at Kerry State.

Utilizing an advocacy/participatory worldview, my intention for this research project was to further my knowledge of the issues pertaining to the current special admit system and use this information to implement change. The basic principle of an advocacy/participatory approach revolves around, “an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers’ lives” (Creswell, 2007, p.21). At the conclusion of this research project, I will prepare a summary that addresses the deficiencies of the current systems and ideas for change. This summary will be presented to the Director of Athletics and others involved with the recruitment and retention of students at Kerry State.

Ethical Considerations

Students are the focal point of this research endeavor; therefore, specific considerations need to be addressed. The special admit program is used by Kerry State to compete with other teams in Division III and is not widely publicized by the institution. Apart from the admissions process, specially admitted student-athletes receive the same services as every other student on campus. In fact, once the student-athlete is accepted and enrolls, very few people on campus know that he/she possessed substandard admissions scores to matriculate into Kerry State.

Specially admitted student-athletes. My research project was designed to gain a better understanding of a specific group of student-athletes. These Division III student-athletes all enrolled at Kerry State University with lower high school SAT and/or GPA scores than the general student body. Since these specially admitted student-athletes are regarded on campus as every other student, I needed to account for their feelings and perceptions about not having

adequate scores to enroll. The purpose of my study was not to single out or draw attention to the fact that they could not have enrolled at Kerry State had they not been an athlete. As such, the names of participants will remain confidential and will not be used at any point.

As a result of the nature of my employment position, students may have been reluctant to share information that criticizes the institution. To diminish any potential biases, I relayed to participants that my study has no affiliation with any of the academic departments on campus. Students also needed to understand that their responses would not be shared with anyone in the athletic department. Participating in the study was strictly confidential. At the top of the survey and in the email sent to participants, it clearly stated that their participation in the study was voluntary and confidential. While interviewing specially admitted student-athletes, I informed them of the purpose of the project and reiterated to them that their names and identifiable information would remain completely confidential. This established a rapport with participants and helped facilitate a candid dialogue.

Kerry State University Athletic Department. The athletic department at Kerry State University uses the special admit system to enroll some of their best players. Without it, the athletic teams at Kerry State may not be as successful. Coaches and administrators at Kerry State are required to produce teams that win. My research endeavors were not intended to expose teams or coaches that have the worst performing specially admitted student-athletes. My intent was to gain a better understanding of the challenges these students endure and use this information to provide a thorough analysis of the challenges these students endure and advocate for additional resources.

Athletic personnel included coaches and advisors that work closely with student-athletes. To obtain accurate and reliable information, I informed personnel that their answers were

confidential and that responses would not be linked to their name or title. This helped personnel speak open and honestly about their experiences.

Conclusion

During the research process, I explored the many obstacles specially admitted student-athletes cope with as they juggle athletics and academics. I gathered data regarding policies, practices, and support systems that either assist or fail to assist student-athletes as they advance toward graduation. I thoroughly analyzed the challenges associated with enrolling with lower academic scores and not being supported academically.

The use of the explanatory sequential mixed method design allowed me to collect and analyze data from a variety of sources, including coaches, student-athletes, and athletic and admissions personnel (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). This type of research study was essential for my project because it allowed me to explore the specially admitted student-athletes academic standing using historical data before gathering information from coaches, players, and administrators about their perceptions of the program and ways it can be improved.

Chapter IV

Findings

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to collect and analyze data that explores the challenges that specially admitted student-athletes endure as they navigate their educational experiences. This study involves specially admitted student-athletes that enrolled at Kerry State University from 2007 and 2011 and uses institutional data to examine the academic standing of participants. This research project also examines the academic services provided to specially admitted student-athletes and ways in which this population interacts with these services as they advance, or fail to advance, toward graduation.

As a result of the nature of this exploratory mixed-methods study, the quantitative phase was conducted first to collect data about the challenges students cope with as they juggle athletics and academics. During the first phase, a survey was used to collect foundational information regarding the perceptions of specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Additionally, institutional data was collected during this phase to better understand the academic standing of participants. These data alone are not sufficient enough to answer the research questions and the specific challenges of specially admitted student-athletes. The second phase, qualitative phase, was given precedence in this study and used standardized open-ended interviews to expand on the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This chapter presents: (a) demographic information of participants (b) data analysis of quantitative and qualitative findings and (c) mixing of the data for interpretation purposes.

Quantitative Phase

During the first phase of this mixed-method research project, institutional data was collected to examine the 199 specially admitted student-athletes that enrolled at Kerry State between 2007 and 2011. These data were collected and analyzed to examine how well each incoming class of specially admitted student-athletes has performed at Kerry State since enrolling. This information lays the foundation for the quantitative and qualitative phases that seek to answer why a large percentage of specially admitted student-athletes are failing to succeed once enrolled.

Institutional Data

As of the spring of 2014, 19 of the 39 (49%) specially admitted student-athletes in the 2007 incoming class had not graduated. Of the 19 that failed to complete their degree at Kerry State, 11 left during or after their first year. In 2008, six (25%) specially admitted student-athletes failed to complete their degree and in 2009, 18 (38%) did not finish their degree. In 2009, seven students left Kerry State after their first year. Reasons for why so many left during or after their first year is further explored in the proceeding quantitative and qualitative analysis sections.

Many of the students in the 2010 and 2011 incoming class are still pursuing their degree and it is too early to determine the success of each class. However, in the 2010 and 2011 incoming classes, 29% and 21% respectively have already failed to complete their degree. The table below outlines the number and percentage of specially admitted student-athletes that graduated, are currently pursuing a bachelor's degree, and failed to complete their degree at Kerry State University.

Table 3

Academic Standing of specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State 2007-2011

Graduation Status	<u>Incoming Class Year</u>				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Graduated	20 (51%)	16 (67%)	13 (27%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)
Pursuing	0 (0%)	2 (8%)	17 (35%)	30 (67%)	34 (79%)
Failed to Graduate (no longer pursuing)	19 (49%)	6 (25%)	18 (38%)	13 (29%)	9 (21%)

Note. Many of the specially admitted student-athletes in the 2010 and 2011 incoming classes are still pursuing a degree and the success of those classes is yet to be determined.

These data put into context the overall academic progress of each class (2007-2011) of specially admitted student-athletes. The proceeding survey and interview data help to explain in great detail why specially admitted student-athletes are graduating at a distressing rate, many of whom are leaving after their first year. After analyzing the institutional data available for this population, a survey was sent to each specially admitted student-athlete to further explore the challenges of this population and begin to answer the research questions of this project.

Response Rate

In the fall of 2013, the online survey was emailed to 199 specially admitted student-athletes that enrolled at Kerry State University from 2007-2011. After the original email and three subsequent reminder emails, 36 of the 199 student-athletes completed some portion of the on-line survey. However, two of the students failed to complete many of the questionnaire items, so their responses were not included in the data analysis. This brought the number of completed on-line surveys to 34.

Many of the student email addresses were no longer valid, so the most conducive way to collect the survey data was to contact each student via telephone calls. After calling every

student-athlete that did not complete the on-line survey, I was able to collect the survey data from 11 additional student-athletes. This brought the total number of students participating in the study to 45, yielding a response rate of 22.6%.

Overall, the students that participated in the survey had an average high school GPA of 3.10 and average SAT/ACT score of 919.78. Once enrolled at Kerry State, these students had an average GPA of 2.65. There are seven students in the survey population that have been awarded a bachelor's degree, 30 that are pursuing a degree, and eight that are not enrolled and no longer pursuing a degree.

Baruch (1999) lists two major reasons for participants not responding to a questionnaire, (1) they simply are not interested, and (2) they never received it. In this research project the two points of access to specially admitted student-athletes were student email addresses and telephone numbers. The telephone numbers were self-reported when students enrolled and the emails were distributed to students once enrolled. Since this study dates back to the 2007 enrollment class, many of the phone numbers were no longer in service. Additionally, students not enrolled at Kerry State for several years are highly unlikely to continue checking their student email accounts. As such, the fewest number of students participating in this study were enrolled in the 2007 and 2008 academic years.

Participant Demographics

Demographic information was collected on the student-athletes and athletic department members that participated in the quantitative and qualitative phases of this research project.

Profile of the survey sample. The table below lists the demographic information for the 45 student-athletes that completed the survey. The majority of participants were female (60%, N=27) and White/Caucasian (89%, N=40). Most students were enrolled in an Education program

(53%, N=24) or Humanities/Social Science program (27%, N=12). The Business (4%, N=2), Communication/Creative Arts (7%, N=3), and Math/Science program (9%, N=4) accounted for the other 20% of students. There were no specially admitted student-athletes enrolled in an Engineering or Performing Arts program.

The 2010 enrollment year class represents the largest number of participants with 15, while the 2011 class had 10 student-athletes participate. The remaining 20 students enrolled in 2007, 2008, and 2009. Field hockey had the most female student-athletes participate (9); while football had the most (7) male student-athletes participate. Every team had at least one student participate, except for softball. The table below provides the demographic information of the 45 specially admitted student-athletes that completed the questionnaire.

Table 4

Demographic Information of the Survey Sample (N=45)

	N	%
Gender		
Men (Participating in a Men's Sport)	18	40
Women (Participating in a Women's Sport)	27	60
Ethnicity		
Hispanic or Latino	3	7
Not Hispanic or Latino	42	93
Race		
American Indian	2	4
Asian	1	2
Black or African American	4	9
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	2
White/Caucasian	40	89
Enrollment Year		
2007	6	13
2008	5	11
2009	9	20
2010	15	33
2011	10	22
Academic Colleges		
Business	2	4
Communication and Creative Arts	3	7
Education	24	53
Engineering	0	0
Humanities and Social Sciences	12	27
Math and Science	4	9
Performing Arts	0	0

Note. The Education and Humanities and Social Sciences Colleges had the most specially admitted student-athletes represented. Law and Justice and Health and Physical Education were the most popular majors amongst this population.

Preliminary Findings of Survey Data

To gather foundational information about the challenges that specially admitted student-athletes endure and the support systems being utilized by the sample population, an on-line survey was administered to the 199 specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State from 2007-

2011. The survey collected demographic information, as well as the thoughts and feelings of the population through the use of open and closed-ended items. The closed-ended Likert scale questions were analyzed during the quantitative phase; whereas the open ended questions were coded and merged in the qualitative phase. The survey used in this study provided preliminary data to begin to answer the first three research questions:

1. What challenges do specially admitted student-athletes encounter at Kerry State University as they navigate their undergraduate experiences?
2. In what ways do the challenges specially admitted student-athletes endure help to explain the academic standing of these students?
3. What support systems are currently in place to aid student-athletes as they navigate their undergraduate experiences at Kerry State University?

This section of the quantitative analysis is used to examine the general perceptions of specially admitted student-athletes. A survey was administered to better understand the overall feelings of specially admitted student-athletes and the challenges they endure. The survey employed a Likert scale; this type of questioning was used to, “measure respondents’ level of agreement or disagreement to multiple items related to a topic of interest” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 234).

General perceptions of student-athletes. Closed-ended, quantitative questions were used to collect data pertaining to the students’ perceptions. Students were asked, (a) how committed they believe they were to their academics, (b) how committed they believe their head coach was to their academics, and (c) how committed they believe the institution was to their academics. This section uses figures to outline the percentages for each question. For each Likert scale question, students were asked to respond with not at all (1), somewhat (2), committed (3),

or very committed (4). These three questions are an essential component to this study as they provide foundational data about student's feelings about their educational experience.

Student-athletes' personal commitment. The first closed-ended question asked students how committed they were to their academics. The overwhelming majority (80%) of students believe they are committed (N=21) or very committed (N=15) to their academics. The remaining 20% of students felt somewhat committed (N=7) or not at all committed (N=2) to their academics. Both students that reported feeling not at all committed to their academics did not graduate and are no longer enrolled. Additionally, both students had college GPAs of less than 1.0. The chart below outlines the respondents' feelings toward their own personal commitment to academics.

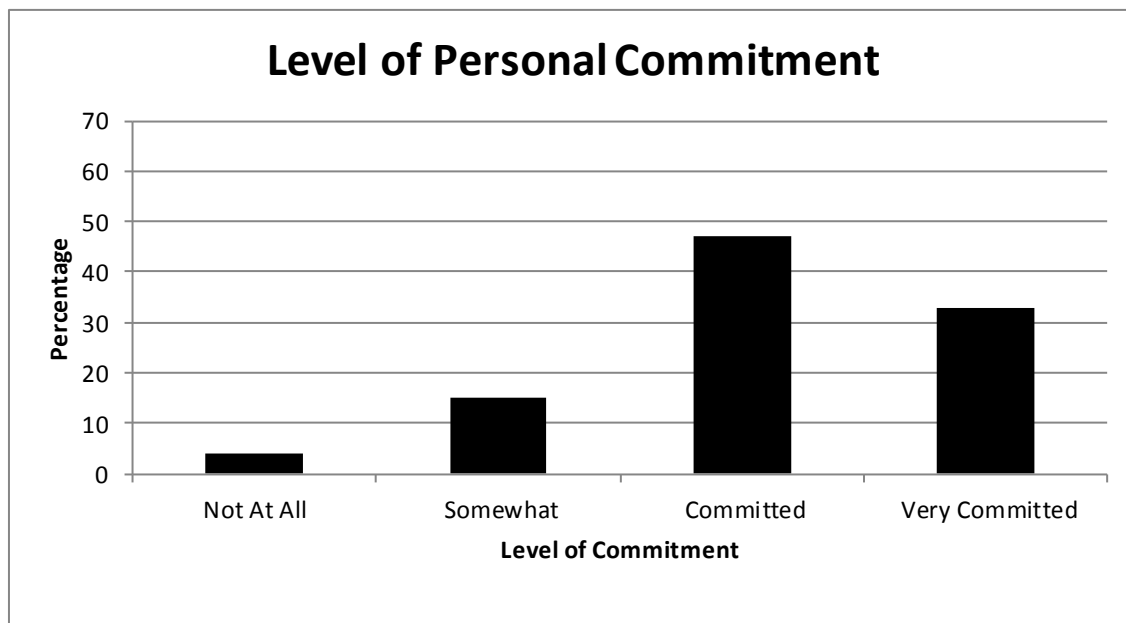


Figure 2. Percentage difference of the level of personal commitment of specially admitted student-athletes.

Commitment of head coach. The second closed-ended question asked students how committed their head coach was to their academics. This question garnered the most responses

for very committed with 24 students (53%) believing their head coach was very committed their academics. The remaining 47% of students reported feeling their head coach was committed (N=12) or somewhat committed (N=9) to their academics. Not one student reported feeling that their head coach was not committed to their academics. The chart below outlines the respondents' feelings toward the commitment of their head coach toward their academics.

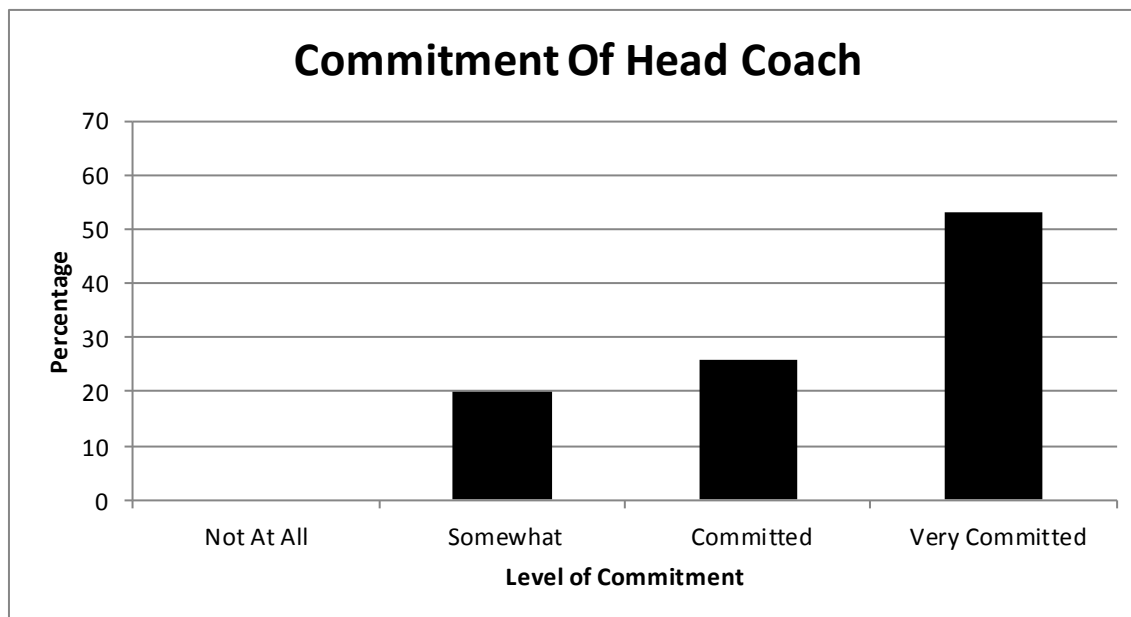


Figure 3. Percentage difference of the perceived commitment to academics from the head coach.

Institutional commitment. The third and final closed-ended question asked students how committed Kerry State University was to ensuring their academic success. The answers for this question were comparable to that of the personal commitment level question. Most (69%) students reported feeling Kerry State was either committed (N=16) or very committed (N=15) to their academics. The remaining 31% of students felt that Kerry State was either somewhat committed (N=12) or not at all committed (N=2) to their academics. The chart below outlines the respondents' feelings toward Kerry State's commitment to their academics.

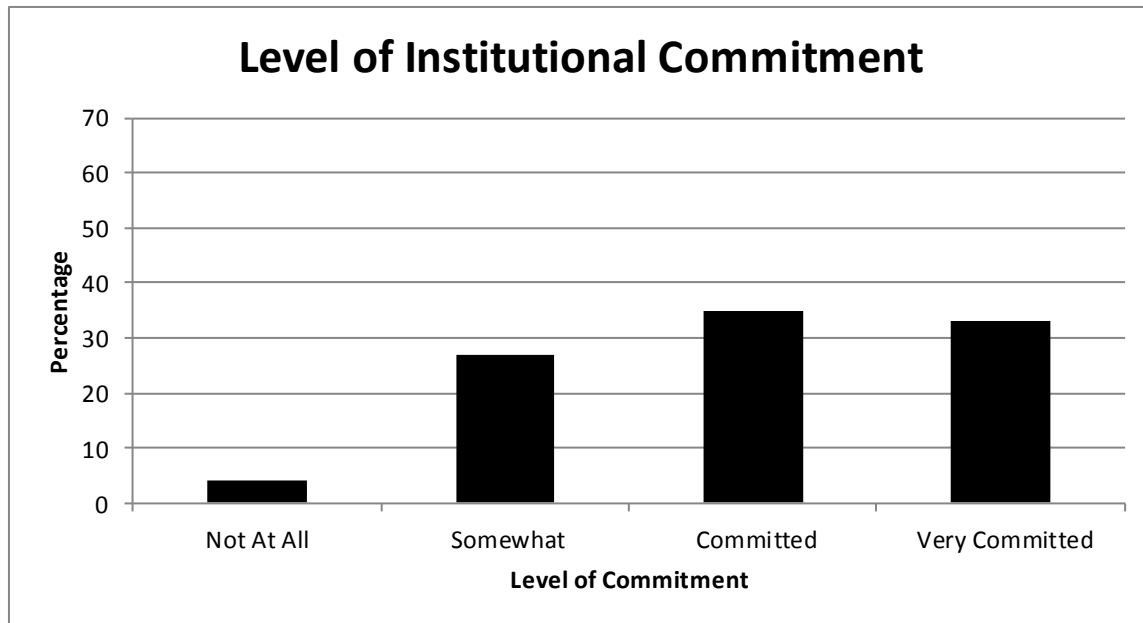


Figure 4. Percentage difference of the level of institutional commitment.

The data derived from the survey clearly show a divide in the way specially admitted student-athletes perceive their own personal commitment to academics and the commitment of their head coach and institution. When asked about their personal commitment to academics, 20% of the respondents indicated feeling not at all or only somewhat committed. A student-athlete not committed to their academics is likely not to complete their degree. It is a wonder why someone not committed to their academics would enroll at an institution of higher learning. The issue of motivation is further explored in the qualitative phase.

Additionally, 31% of respondents felt Kerry State was not at all committed or only somewhat committed to their academics. As later highlighted in the qualitative analysis, the specially admitted student-athlete at Kerry State is inundated with athletic constraints, leaving little time to get involved in extracurricular activities outside of their particular sport. This is problematic for the student-athlete that discontinues participating in athletics. There is also a

level of connectedness that a student-athlete feels by participating that discontinuing to participate has the potential to detach the student from the rest of the campus community.

After collecting and analyzing the survey data, an interview protocol was developed to further explore the survey data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Questions were designed to better understand the challenges specially admitted student-athletes endure as they navigate their educational experiences. The qualitative phase was given precedence in this research project. Furthermore, quantitative data is woven into the qualitative phase to illuminate the challenges that this population endures.

Qualitative Phase

The qualitative phase of this study is used to expound upon the initial quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This phase has been given priority in this research project and was thoroughly analyzed to fully explain the phenomenon of specially admitted student-athletes enrolling at Kerry State with lower incoming test scores (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The initial interview protocol was derived from the quantitative phase and responses from the student-athlete surveys.

Qualitative Analysis of Survey and Interview Data

Three open-ended survey questions were asked to participants during the first phase of this research project. This type of questioning was used to focus on creating and understanding concepts and ideas (Toma, 2006). The questions were qualitative in nature and needed to be coded as such (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Student-athlete responses' are merged with the interview data throughout this section to illustrate the findings. Some student-athletes responded to the open-ended questions with a word or two, while others wrote in short phrases. To code the

student responses, recurring words were highlighted and analyzed to make sense of the data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Toma, 2006).

After collecting and analyzing the survey data, an interview protocol was devised to further explore the challenges that specially admitted student-athletes endure. This section of Chapter IV is designed to shed light on the major themes developed over the course of twenty interviews with specially admitted student-athletes, coaches, advisors, and athletic department members. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes; however a few of the athletic personnel interviews lasted significantly longer, up to one hour and fifteen minutes.

Profile of the Interview Sample

The table below lists the demographic information of the student-athletes that were interviewed. It also lists the demographic information of the athletic department members that were interviewed. A total of twenty open-ended interviews were conducted, twelve with student-athletes and eight with athletic personnel members (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Of the specially admitted student-athletes that participated in the interviews, half (N=6) were male and half (N=6) were female. Of the participants interviewed, the majority were White/Caucasian (N=7) and Black/African American (N=3); of the remaining two, one was Latino and the other was American Indian. Each class (2007-2011) had at least one student-athlete interviewed and the 2010 (N=4) had the most.

Of the 12 student-athletes interviewed, seven are majoring in Education; all seven are Health and Physical Education majors. There were four students in Humanities and Social Science, with three of the four enrolled in Law and Justice Studies. There was one student, a Biology major, listed in the Math/Science College. There were two students with GPAs of 2.0 or less, both of whom are no longer enrolled or pursuing a degree at Kerry State.

The athletic personnel member interviews consisted of three head coaches, one assistant coach, three advisors and one administrator in a higher-level management position that has varying roles within the athletic department. As a result of the multifaceted work pertaining to student-athletes, a variety of athletic department personnel was selected. Table 3 below represents the demographic information of the interview sample.

Table 5

Demographic Information of the Interview Sample (N=20)

	N	%
Gender of specially admitted student-athletes		
Men (participating in a male sport)	6	50
Women (participating in a female sport)	6	50
Athletic Personnel		
Men's Head Coach	2	25
Women's Head Coach	1	13
Men's Assistant Coach	1	13
Women's Assistant Coach	0	0
Athletic Advisor	3	38
Management	1	13

Note. At least one specially admitted student-athlete was interviewed from each incoming class (2007-2011). The 2010 incoming class had the most interviewed with four. The athletic personnel were selected because of their relationship with this population.

Findings

To expound upon the foundational data collected during the first phase of the study, interviews were conducted with twelve specially admitted student-athletes and eight athletic department members (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The open-ended interviews provided the students and staff at Kerry State the opportunity to speak candidly about their experiences. The interview questions were derived from the institutional data and student survey responses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As

such, a significant portion of the interviews with participants was spent exploring student-athlete issues related to time management, campus engagement, and services provided for this population.

This section is divided into themes that arose as a result of the interviews (Saldana, 2009). These themes are essential to understanding the central phenomenon of this research project, student-athletes enrolling at Kerry State with lower academic scores than the general population. The themes help to answer the project's research questions, which were as follows:

1. What challenges do specially admitted student-athletes encounter at Kerry State University as they navigate their undergraduate experiences?
2. In what ways do the challenges specially admitted student-athletes endure help to explain the academic standing of these students?
3. What support systems are currently in place to aid student-athletes as they navigate their undergraduate experiences at Kerry State University?
4. What significant themes emerged as a result of this mixed methods research project?

Three themes emerged as a result of the qualitative analysis and depicted student-athletes as navigators of an unreasonable system. Second, the analysis identifies student-athlete engagement as a major finding of this study. And, finally, the analysis demonstrates how the individual is reconceptualized as an athlete-student within the context of the institution.

Although the first phase, quantitative phase, of this study provided important information pertaining to the perceptions of specially admitted student-athletes, the information gleaned does not fully answer the research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This section provides a thorough analysis of the qualitative results.

Additionally, research questions are answered by revisiting the quantitative data and merging the two phases.

Navigators of an unreasonable system. Specially admitted student-athletes are a unique group of students at Kerry State that face an uncommon set of challenges. These challenges vary greatly as students navigate their higher education pathways. This theme, navigators of an unreasonable system, is broken into several subthemes that outline the difficulties associated with being a specially admitted student-athlete at Kerry State. These subthemes include the rise in the academic profile, student-athlete constraints, and the burden of increased tuition. This theme is intended to further explore the challenges associated with navigating a deficient system.

For student-athletes, navigating means using available resources to achieve the intended goal, graduating with a bachelor's degree. These resources are not sufficient, thus creating an unreasonable system. This theme outlines the major hurdles that make the successful completion of a bachelor's degree particularly problematic for this population.

Rise in the academic profile. Kerry State University allows the athletic department to specially admit roughly 50 student-athletes each year. These students require a special admit because they failed to meet general admission standards. Once accepted these students are asked to navigate the higher education waters with little to no additional assistance.

Specially admitted student-athletes are asked to partake in courses with peers that have been regularly admitted and often have far higher incoming SAT scores and GPAs. One men's head coach stated, "The academic profile has increased over the last couple of years, making it more challenging." The rise in the profile presents challenges for specially admitted student-athletes and often leads to failure. Additionally, over the last five years the academic standards at

Kerry State have gradually increased, while the special admission requirements have remained stagnant (Kerry State Annual Admissions Report, 2013).

The academic profile (including the critical reading and math portion of the SAT) of incoming deposited students at Kerry State has risen considerably over the previous five years. The average critical reading SAT score has risen every year but one, while the average math score has risen every year. In 2009, the average critical reading SAT score for a deposited, incoming Kerry State freshman was 522 and the math was 544. In 2013, the average critical reading score was 543 and the average math score was 568 (Kerry State Admissions Office Annual Report, 2013). The table below provides a visual graphic of the uptick of SAT scores for the past five years of deposited students at Kerry State.

Table 6

Incoming critical reading and math SAT scores of the incoming students at Kerry State

SAT	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013
Critical Reading	522	528	534	533	543
Math	544	552	557	567	568

Note. Information obtained from the Kerry State Admissions Office Annual Report, 2013.

The increase in the academic profile is onerous for a group of students that failed to meet the general requirements needed to enroll at Kerry State. The SAT exam is just one indicator used to evaluate college applications; however a more than 20 point increase in both the critical reading and math portion of the exam has placed specially admitted student-athletes in the classroom with more academically gifted students.

While the quality of students enrolling at Kerry State has increased, the requirements for specially admitted student-athletes have remained constant; minimum 820 SAT score and 2.0

GPA. Consequently, specially admitted student-athletes may feel overwhelmed and underprepared. While discussing the academic challenges of student-athletes, one men's head coach stated:

Our profile has also gone up making recruiting more challenging. The students that get here are in the classroom with better students than let's say 10-15 years ago. There are more challenges associated with the increased academic rigor.

During interviews, several students expressed a concern for not feeling academically prepared to handle coursework. Both specially admitted student-athletes that did not graduate and are no longer pursuing a degree at Kerry State used words like "frustrated" and "overwhelmed" to describe their experiences. One female student-athlete that did not complete her degree at Kerry State explained:

The schedule of playing a sport and attending class was crazy. I often times felt overwhelmed and wasn't prepared. I hung out with friends way too much and didn't do my work enough.

Another student that failed to complete his degree stated:

I hung out in the dorms a lot and my friends would stay up late. I missed classes and missed assignments. Playing baseball was helpful at keeping me on a schedule, but when I wasn't playing, I struggled in the classroom.

The two student explanations above provide a glimpse of the academic preparedness of many in this population. Both struggled in the classroom and were not prepared to handle the rigor of college academics.

Specially admitted student-athletes not equipped to handle the academic rigor is a serious concern for the athletic department and university. For the athletic department, the student is often times an integral part of the team's success; not being eligible could impede team success. From a university standpoint, students not doing well in the classroom negatively impacts retention and graduation rates. Specially admitted student-athletes that doubt their academic

ability is a serious concern for persistence, a necessary ingredient for completing a college degree (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980). In addition to being in the classroom with more academically gifted students, specially admitted student-athletes face additional constraints that make navigating the system even more exacting.

Student-athlete constraints. Of the specially admitted student-athletes that graduated or are on pace to graduate, half of the participants stated playing a sport helped their academic progress. The student-athletes that believed their time management strategies helped their academic progress discussed having a structured schedule with very little free time. A schedule consisting of practice, weight training, film sessions, study hall, class, and studying, along with part-time jobs for some, is what occupies a consistent, structured agenda. For some, this schedule provides stability and keeps them focused and disciplined. A junior baseball player while discussing his time management skills explained:

Time management definitely helps because it makes me do my work. Otherwise, if I had more time, I would probably procrastinate and find something else to do - with traveling and everything you have to have a set schedule or you're going to get backed up.

However, not all of the students interviewed stated their ability to manage their time was beneficial for academic progress. Six of the student-athletes discussed struggling with time management and waiting until the last minute to complete assignments. Not surprisingly, the two student-athletes no longer enrolled at Kerry State and failed to complete their degree explained their time management skills hurt their academic progress. One stated, "Time management definitely hurt. I often waited until the last minute to complete assignments. I really never did the readings. I was not ready for college."

As a result of the student's schedules being more structured in-season, many of the athletic personnel members felt that players actually do better in-season. This concept of student-

athletes performing better academically in-season was not asked, but was discussed by seven of the eight athletic personnel members interviewed. One men's head coach stated:

I think time management is the single biggest factor in their success compared to what they're used to in high school. I always tell my guys when they visit, most of these kids go to school for 35 hours in high school. You come here you're in school for 15 hours. What are you going to do with the other 20 hours?

When discussing the time management of his student-athletes, another men's head coach explained:

Our athletes do better in-season, and we pretty much prove that every year. The kids that are in season are much more disciplined. They know they have practice and have to go to practice. Coaches have their finger on the pulse. The time management in-season with all of the responsibilities is a big plus for student-athletes.

Many of the coaches interviewed believed student-athletes perform better in-season because of their daily interaction with them. This allows them to closely monitor their academic progress. In the off-season however, coaches do not see their student-athletes nearly as often. Additionally, student-athletes have more free time in the off-season. When discussing the difference between in and out of season, one head coach stated:

You see them every day and you know if you have an at-risk student and you can stay on top of them. If you don't see them, like in the off-season, within two weeks they can have academic problems because you may not have your finger on the pulse.

Student-athletes do not have the same team obligations in the off-season and must utilize their time wisely. With a less structured schedule, more of the responsibility of how to persist with their academic endeavors falls on the student-athlete. For specially admitted student-athletes that are not provided additional academic support, navigating the higher education system can be daunting, especially for those with poor time management skills.

Burden of increased tuition. The specially admitted student-athletes interviewed shared very similar challenges about their experiences at Kerry State. Of the twelve student-athletes

interviewed, seven used the words juggle and balance or discussed issues with time and time management when asked to discuss some of their challenges about being a Division III student-athlete. One advisor that works with student-athletes stated, “People talk about problems at Division I because of the demands, but the demands at the Division III level are similar. Difference is, our students are not on scholarship and have to work to get money.”

When discussing their challenges, many of the participants listed the demands of athletics and the classroom, but some also added the demands of working part-time and having a social life as extremely exhausting. When discussing her schedule, a third year track and field member stated:

I’m not really into track this year. I feel like I don’t have time to play this year. I’m tired all the time and I have a job. I work at Shoprite. I am in my own apartment and I have bills to pay.

Navigating college and the stress of college-level coursework can be exhausting, but also trying to work can be a recipe for failure.

Five of the eight athletic personnel interviewed stated that more of their student-athletes are working than in years past. When discussing the challenges of student-athletes, one of the athletic advisors stated:

I think that because a lot of our students come from blue-collar backgrounds that some of them have to work and worry about paying for college. They have to worry about paying for school and paying for things. We have a lot of first generation students that makes it a challenge.

This is a major hurdle as tuition for a full-time undergraduate at Kerry State has risen six of the last seven years (Kerry State Annual Bursar Report, 2013). Increased tuition and working in season adds to the challenges student-athletes endure because it leaves even less time for educationally related activities.

One men's head coach explained, "You get a sense that they are a little more financially strapped, especially with the economy." Another coach said that he typically schedules Sunday as the student-athletes' day of rest, but is finding more of his players working on their only day off. The coach explained:

I am constantly trying to adjust the practice schedule because guys have to work, especially in the last four to five year. This past season, I had over half of my team that was working in season. We also have more commuters as well, strictly because of price. You can't get a job that will cover tuition and room and board. You can't save that kind of money over summer. Guys are working; 20 years ago I would tell guys you can't work and play but now I have to accommodate the guys that are working. Parents can't afford to pay for both and neither can the kids (student-athletes).

As such, working for specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State can make the process of navigating the higher education pathways even more burdensome.

This concept was echoed throughout many of the interviews as student-athletes are faced with the major stressor of increased tuition and the burden of working during the academic year to pay for expenses associated with attending college. Additionally, working leaves less time for student-athletes to get involved in campus activities outside of athletics. Participating in educationally related activities is an essential component to the completion of a college degree (Kuh, 2009; Wolf-Wendel, et al., 2009). For student-athletes, whose time is already compromised, working leaves even less time to get involved in educationally meaningful activities on campus.

Student-athlete engagement. At Kerry State, specially admitted student-athletes are not closely monitored nor provided additional academic support, even though they enrolled with lower scores. Kerry State does not have a plan in place to aid these students toward graduation. While participating in the surveys and interviews, student-athletes spoke highly of coaches and the support provided. However, for the student-athletes that struggle on the playing field and

eventually stop participating, the University does not have a plan to ensure that these students are remaining persistent in their graduation endeavors, which may be why 31% of the student-athletes listed the University as either not at all or only somewhat committed to their academics.

Therefore, here I focus on the various factors impacting student engagement. I examine the inconsistencies that persist as specially admitted student-athletes navigate the student lifecycle, from enrollment to graduation. Student-athletes at Kerry State are completely consumed with their particular sport and their motivation stems from a commitment to the team, driving so many to excel in the classroom. For those that struggle on the playing field, there is not the same motivation to succeed at Kerry State.

Student motivation. A student-athlete participating in Division III athletics needs to maintain a 2.0 GPA or better to participate (NCAA, 2012). The thrill of competing is what drives so many both on the playing field and in the classroom. The student-athletes performing well on the field have the added motivation to do well in the classroom. During interviews, student-athletes expressed a need to do well academically because of a responsibility they felt to their teammates and coaches. A female lacrosse player explained:

I think that being an athlete here you have a bond with the other athletes. Everyone wants our athletes to succeed. You want to go and watch your peers play. I think that being an athlete here, you create a bond with your fellow teammates. Everyone on the team wants you to do well.

The student-athletes that feel connected with teammates want to succeed in the classroom to stay eligible and continue participating. One head coach stated:

Being part of a team, I think they feel like they're part of something special. They understand each other's struggles. It forces them to be accountable, not only to me, but to the other people on the team. You have a responsibility to them to do your job.

The statements above from the student-athlete and coach exemplify the increased motivation that student-athletes feel as a result of the camaraderie formed with teammates and coaches. This bond propels many to succeed in the classroom.

The student-athletes not performing well on the playing field do not have that added motivation to perform well in the classroom. A student having difficulty in both may be particularly in danger of falling behind academically. When discussing student-athlete motivation, a women's head coach stated:

If they (student-athlete) are average in the classroom and average on the field, they are going to give up one. They'll go crazy and wind up giving up playing to focus on academics. When they are average or poor in both, they usually struggle. They really need to be excellent in one and we try to work on the other. I really think they need to feel success in one area to have a tie in or they may not make it. Instant gratification is an issue. If they are struggling in both they may not be getting that instant gratification that they are used to.

The dilemma described by the head coach is the ultimate challenge for many in this population. For a student-athlete, already challenged in the classroom, a setback on the playing field can cause an overwhelming feeling difficult to overcome. A major loss, injury, or setback encountered on the playing field can be emotionally draining and have dire consequences for academic progress.

Specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State face an unparalleled set of challenges. As athletes, they experience adversity and must cope with an ongoing cycle of highs and lows. Individual or team success may produce a feeling of excitement and accomplishment. While an individual or team loss can be discouraging. From a university standpoint, it would be prudent to implement a system, where special admits are monitored and supported, even when they decide to discontinue participating in athletics. This concept is further explored in the implications section of chapter five.

Student involvement. As previously discussed, the natural camaraderie formed amongst student-athletes is what drives so many, but this bond also has the potential to isolate this population from the rest of the campus community. Student-athletes and athletic department members were asked a two-part question regarding student involvement. The first question asked student-athletes if playing a sport helped them feel like part of the Kerry State community and the second asked about their involvement in clubs and organizations outside of athletics. Many of the players discussed an organic companionship that is developed amongst players. When student-athletes discussed getting involved they stressed how easy it is to make friends within their particular team. One female lacrosse player stated:

Being in a sport is like being in a fraternity or sorority. I really don't like that analogy, but it helps you coming in as a freshman knowing that you already have a group of friends that are going to be there for you. If you don't play a sport you may not know anyone. When you come in as an athlete, you already know that the girls also love the sport.

Athletics at Kerry State is very demanding and time-consuming, allowing little time for student-athletes to get involved in activities outside of their particular sport. This also has the potential to isolate student-athletes from the rest of the campus community. When discussing student-athlete involvement, one advisor stated:

I just don't think that athletics has been a big enough part of the student life here that it makes them (student-athletes) feel as much a part of student life as maybe it should. Sometimes athletics makes them feel isolated because they spend so much time concentrating on their sport. They sometimes don't have an opportunity to participate in other aspects of the community. So, here I am as a student-athlete and I'm expected to keep my grades up and I have study hall, lifting, practice, service projects, and watching other student-athletes. These requirements leave less time for participating in other events and clubs. In one regard they are very much a part of student life, but also very separated because of the demands of the sport.

Participating in athletics leaves little time for student-athletes to get involved in other clubs and organizations.

During the interviews many of the student-athletes noted not having time to get involved in other clubs or organizations outside of their particular sport. A third year female track student stated, “I would like to join more clubs but don't have the time.” A fourth year cross county student stated, “I'm not but I wish I was. I'm always interested in other things but with school and my sport, I really don't have any time to do anything else.” Only one student-athlete interviewed discussed being involved in a club or activity outside of athletics. The one student stated she is involved with an educational program related to her major and they have a club that goes to some of the local school districts to mentor underserved youths. Student-involvement is vital for the successful completion of a college degree (Astin, 1985; Kuh, 1995; Tinto, 1975).

The athletic department is cognizant of the time constraints on athletes and tries to implement programs within the confines of the team. When discussing how they were involved in the campus community, the other 11 student-athletes only discussed certain programs that were devised by their coaches. A fourth year baseball player stated, “I am not involved in anything else. Everything I do is through the athletic department.”

These student-athletes stated they were involved on campus, but when probed to describe the activities, participants only listed activities that their individual team is involved. For example, a senior football listed three or four different projects that he was involved with, however each one pertained to programs established by the football coaching staff. When asked if he was in other clubs or organizations he stated, “No, not really. I consider football to be a club. It really took up so much time.”

For student-athletes whose time is limited, participating in outside clubs and organizations is challenging. The coaches are aware of the time constraints and try to incorporate meaningful activities within the program to encourage community engagement. However,

because of time constraints, many student-athletes are not able to attend campus wide events. This has the potential to be problematic from a university standpoint, because once a student-athlete stops participating in athletics, their connection to the wider campus is broken.

The athlete-student. An interesting reconceptualization became lucid during interviews with coaches and students. The term student-athlete is often used to describe a population attending a particular institution while also playing a sport. This term gives the impression the person attending is a student first and athlete second. However, that was not the case in this research project.

When asked about the greatest challenge, a football player stated, “My biggest challenge has been balancing my time between football and school. They say you are a student-athlete but in actuality you’re really an athlete-student.” When discussing the role of athletics, one advisor stated, “Many times the sport is the driving force rather than the other way around.” This theme is intended to illuminate some of the structural deficiencies at Kerry State and answer why a student athlete might feel like an athlete-student. It will focus on how specially admitted student-athletes are looked upon as athletes, while also happening to attend a university.

Resources for success. Most, if not all, special admit programs at Kerry State provide students with very specific resources and programming. Examples of the resources provided include summer preparation programs, academic advising, and mentorship programs. Within these programs, students are obligated to attend workshops, information sessions, and appointments with advisors and mentors. Many of these special admit programs have full-time staff to aid at-risk students.

The specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State do not enter into a special program and are not provided additional resources. Kerry State has not hired additional staff to track this

population. Additionally, many of the coaches do not track their special admits. One women's head coach stated:

For me, I really don't track our special admits. I don't even know who they are. I don't pay them any more attention. I have a few that I need to watch carefully. I really think they need to feel success in one area to have a tie in or they may not make it.

When asked about how special admits are tracked, a few of the coaches explicitly stated they do not assess their special admits and hold them to the same academic standards as the rest of the team.

As an institution, Kerry State does not monitor these students or have measures in place to provide the additional support needed for so many. Although there are similarities with how each coach handles academic issues pertaining to student-athletes, each one implements his/her own policies and procedures. One administrator explained, "All of our coaches are responsible for their student-athletes. They check their grades and provide study hall and tutoring." It is not prudent for the university to rely on head coaches to track this population and be responsible for providing academic support.

As students first, specially admitted student-athletes should have the necessary resources and programming to obtain a bachelor's degree at Kerry State; as athletes first they do not. If a specially admitted student-athlete decides to discontinue participating in athletics, there should be a plan in place to ensure the student, who enrolled with lower scores, is still closely monitored. One student that failed to complete his degree explained:

It would have been nice if someone would have followed up with me after I stopped playing. I felt like since I wasn't playing anymore, no one cared. I stopped going to class and no one checked in on me at all.

There are not the same resources for this population as they try to navigate higher education. Other specially admitted students enroll with the understanding that additional

resources are needed to be successful. As such, this group of student-athletes is not provided additional services and relies on the coaching staff to assist with academic issues, again perpetuating the athlete first mentality.

The athlete first mentality is also shared by student-athletes, many of whom place precedence on athletics. It was a dilemma shared by several of the participants, For example, one third year player explained:

Football is very important and even though the coaches say that being a student is more important, I feel like they hold football over being a student. Sometimes you feel like which one is a priority, like which one are you going to pick. Should I go out and practice or should I study more?

Another student-athlete described her predicament and stated:

I'm not saying that running comes first, but some of my major courses are only offered at certain times of the year and I keep putting it off and I think I might be falling behind. I am going to probably have to take summer classes to stay on pace to graduate.

The examples above provide insights into the moral dilemma of students torn between trying to satisfy their athletic and academic responsibilities. According to Astin's (1985) student involvement theory, students have a limited amount of time to partake in educationally related activities. As a result of time constraints, student-athletes have even less time to devote to academics.

Coaches as advisors. At the Division I level, student-athletes have a myriad of academic resources, including tutors and advisors. These resources ensure that student-athletes are making satisfactory progress toward earning a degree (NCAA, 2012). At the Division III level, those resources are not as readily available. One Kerry State advisor that has experience at the Division I level stated:

If you look at Division I institutions, they may have anywhere between 3-20 academic advisors (for athletics). They have someone looking over them (student-athletes) in the event that they don't go to class or aren't doing the things that they need to do.

Kerry State is a Division III institution and does not have advisors specifically designed to work with student-athletes. As a result, the coaches are forced to serve multiple roles.

The coaches play a vital role in the academic success of student-athletes at Kerry State. Although they do not usually provide tutoring or direct academic advising, they are proficient at assisting students with their individual issues. One female lacrosse graduate stated, “My coach helped me a lot. She was very understanding. If we had issues with our schedule she would help us work it out.” Another student-athlete explained, “Our head coach helps with whatever. She graduated from here, so she knows everyone. If you are ever struggling, she knows who to contact.” Coaches are essential component in the student-athletes’ transition to college life and college academics.

All participants spoke highly of their head coach and/or coaching staff, even the two that are no longer pursuing a degree at Kerry State. Half of the participants stated their head coach was the first person they consulted when difficult academic issues emerge. They described a positive relationship with their head coach and stated it was very beneficial having someone constantly monitoring their academic progress. One student-athlete when discussing her head coach explained:

My head coach is literally the greatest man I've ever met in my life. I love him to death. He helps me with everything, either academic or sports based. Last year, we got a pair of throwing shoes and I ran threw them pretty quickly so he bought me a brand new pair out of his own pocket. Whatever I need, issues with teachers, everything. If any of his athletes have issues, he will discuss it with the athlete and then follow up with the professor. If they have a problem with scheduling or missing classes because of a meet, he will go right to the professor. He is very direct.

A few also stated that their coaches are frequently monitoring their academic progress and making sure they are going to class and doing their school work. A 2013 graduate that played football explained:

The coaches are on top of things. They know if you are not going to class. They know when you are struggling and they get on you. It was beneficial just being that you have someone looking over your shoulder and constantly pushing you.

Student-athletes are also fully aware that their coaches control playing time. If the coaches receive a negative report about one of their student-athletes, it could jeopardize the student-athlete's playing time. The football graduate explained:

As a student-athlete, you love the sport you are playing and the coaches have the ability to take away playing time. You don't want to mess up. Everyone wants to play. It helped me to be discipline with football and school work.

Overarchingly, each coach implements his/her own procedures for ensuring academic success from student-athletes. It was noted multiple times that each coaching staff has the discretion to implement their own policies for retaining and graduating student-athletes. One advisor stated:

Each coach does things their own way. So the follow-up with academic support really comes down to the head coach, unfortunately. It would be great if we had a staff to deal with that, but at this point it comes down to the head coach.

As a Division III institution, Kerry State does not have academic advisors assigned to student-athletes and relies on coaches to monitor and advise students.

A few coaches explained that they only try to recruit students that they truly believe have the ability to succeed. When discussing how coaches implement policies to ensure academic success, one member of the athletic department stated, "It varies, the coaches with higher standards have a higher GPA. The coaches with higher expectations do not recruit players that aren't going to go to class." Another coach said that he begins laying the foundation for his expectations before the student-athletes even enroll. He stated:

For me, when I'm recruiting someone I make them aware that they are at an academic institution. If we don't have those conversations beforehand then we are not going to be able to expect those results. I make sure the SA is well aware of our expectations prior to enrolling.

All coaches should have high standards for their student-athletes. Only student-athletes believed capable of succeeding academically should be permitted to enroll, regardless of their athletic abilities. As students first, the number one priority should revolve around helping students meet their academic goals.

The athlete-student and academic progress. The overwhelming majority of the student-athletes interviewed believed playing a sport in college helped their academic progress. These students felt like playing a sport helped them maintain a schedule conducive to completing assignments and doing well in school. A 2013 Kerry State graduate that played women's lacrosse explained:

I believe it helped me because I had a schedule I had to abide by. It kept me structured and prevented me from going out and partying. We had a study hall program that I believe was mandatory for freshman and sophomores. It allowed us to do work and study.

All of the members of the athletic department believed that playing a sport helped student-athletes' academic progress. A women's head coach stated:

Playing a sport helps, for sure, because it forces the student-athlete to be on schedule. It forces them to be accountable - not only to me, but to the other 24-99 other people on your team. You have a responsibility to them (teammates) to do your job.

Each coach implements his/her own strategies for ensuring that student-athletes are excelling in the classroom. One higher administration member stated, "All of our coaches are responsible for their student-athletes. They check their grades and provide study hall and tutoring." Although most implement some form of a study-hall program, a few actually do not have any program at all. Some coaches have a standard two hour study-hall where students are mandated to attend, while others have a system where student-athletes sign an attendance sheet and go to the library for a set number of hours. Those that use a study-hall system require it for underclassman and student-athletes below a certain GPA.

Several students felt like playing a sport hampered their academic progress. Time constraints were cited as the major factor for struggling with coursework. Also, one student stated he did not play a sport long enough to fully evaluate the impact that athletics had on his academic progress. He stated, "It probably hurt my academics. The schedule of playing a sport and attending class was crazy." Another student explained, "For me it was all about time. I got injured during my sophomore year and then I started missing classes. I was partying a little too much and my grades suffered." These students expressed a discomforting feeling trying to juggle academics and athletics. For many, the structured schedule of being a college athlete is beneficial, however to some it is overwhelming and difficult to manage.

After analyzing the athletic personnel interviews, it is clear that there is not a unified support system being utilized by the athletic department. The athletic personnel interviews revealed various ideas and opinions about the most effective ways of ensuring academic success for student-athletes. Many cited lack of resources as a major roadblock for implementing the ideal system. One advisor that works closely with student-athletes explained:

I think it comes down to staffing and support. I think we could do more. We don't have someone who could go through and make sure they are taking the classes that fit and make the most sense. Sometimes a coach will look over it. They are not forced to meet with an academic advisor. Half don't know who their academic advisors are.

Members of the athletic department would like to do more to support student-athletes but often do not have the necessary funding to do so.

During the first phase of this project, specially admitted student-athletes were asked how committed they believed Kerry State was to academics. This question garnered the highest percentage (31%) of respondents feeling like Kerry State was either not at all committed or somewhat committed to their academics. After conducting the interviews, it became evident why many of the participants felt Kerry State was not committed to their academic success. There is

not a university-wide support system in place and academic support and monitoring is left to individual coaches. This is extremely problematic for those students that enroll and decide to stop participating in athletics. As students first, this population should be provided with the resources needed to graduate.

Conclusion

Specially admitted student-athletes face a unique set of challenges at Kerry State. As college students, they attend class, write papers, participate in group projects, and study for exams. As athletes, they deal with the athletic requirements of practice, work-outs, meetings, games, and travel. However, specially admitted student-athletes must cope with additional challenges, making the process of higher education even more difficult to navigate.

First, specially admitted student-athletes are permitted to enroll at Kerry State with lower academic scores. The requirements for this population to enroll have remained stagnant, while the academic standards of the institution have risen considerably. Next, participating in athletics is very time-consuming, leaving little time for these students to get involved in extracurricular activities outside of athletics. Also, tuition at Kerry State has risen over the years and more student-athletes are working, leaving even less time to get involved in campus-wide events. Lastly, even though this population had lower enrollment scores, they do not enter into a special program and often rely on coaches to provide academic support. They are not provided the needed services, thus forcing them to navigate an inadequate system.

Chapter V

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

This chapter is designed to connect findings from this research project to the literature surrounding student-athletes. I will revisit the concept of student engagement and the impact on specially admitted student-athletes. Specifically, I will further explore the challenges that specially admitted student-athletes endure as they navigate their educational pathways.

This chapter helps explain the phenomenon of specially admitted student-athletes enrolling at a Division III institution with lower academic scores. These students failed to meet general admissions requirements, however were granted permission to enroll because of their athletic abilities. These students are expected to meet the demands of higher education even though they produced substandard academic results in high school. Specially admitted student-athletes must cope with a number of issues making the prospect of earning a bachelor's degree particularly challenging. These challenges are furthered explored in this chapter. Additionally, I discuss implications of the findings for research, practice and policy in higher education and athletics. Lastly, a conclusion is provided to encapsulate the project.

Discussion of the Findings

The research is decisive regarding college students: the more involved and engaged they are the greater the likelihood for academic success (Kuh, 2009; Wolf-Wendel, et al., 2009). Additionally, a more involved student is more likely to build lasting relationships, thus creating future career opportunities. For student-athletes, so much of their time and energy is dedicated to developing athletic ability, often resulting in a conflicting schedule with little time to explore other educational and social interests (Watt & Moore, 2001; Person & LeNoir, 1997). For many,

the time constraints stymie the opportunity to excel off the field: in the classroom and on campus (Adler & Adler, 1985; Jolly, 2008).

A major theme developed during this research project revolves around a mentality that is cloaked in a contrary way of perceiving university athletics. Student-athletes enroll in higher education to earn a degree, however the mindset that participating in sports should be at the forefront has permeated many involved with athletics. This athlete-student conundrum is typically perceived for those participating in revenue generating Division I sports. However, that mentality is also prevalent at the Division III level. This has the ability to impact the perceptions of those transitioning from high school to college level academics.

When the expectations of a student transitioning to college revolve around athletics, academic performance is compromised (Schilling & Schilling, 2005). Kuh (2005) writes, “what students expect shape their behavior, which in turn affects their academic performance and social adjustment to college life” (p. 88). If a student-athlete is enrolled in higher education mainly for athletic purposes, the ultimate goal of earning a degree is jeopardized. In this project, many student-athletes expressed a discomfoting feeling associated with juggling academics and athletics.

Student-athletes face many challenges related to participating in intercollegiate athletics (Watt & Moore, 2001); but those that have been specially admitted face a unique set of obstacles that make academic success particularly difficult. This research project unveiled important concepts regarding the experiences endured by a group of specially admitted student-athletes, such as the impact of increased enrollment standards and the lack of resources and programming being afforded to this population. This project exposed how poorly this at-risk group of students

has performed, especially during their first year. In this section, I discuss how findings from this project connect to the literature surrounding student-athletes.

Specially Admitted Student-Athlete Challenges

According to the NCAA (2014), student-athletes make up 19% (ranging from 1-50% depending on the institution) of the overall student population on Division III campuses; combining for over 400,000 student-athletes. This population comprises a significant portion of the student's enrolling in higher education each year, however very little is known about this population (Robst & Keil, 2000). Additionally, little is known about the admissions standards currently being employed at the Division III level.

There is a growing trend in higher education in regards to student enrollment. To improve rankings, many schools are matriculating students based primarily on SAT scores. This is done to increase the enrollment profile and selectivity of that particular institution (Kuh, 2005). The higher enrollment profile leads to a more academically prepared student population, however for institutions with special admit populations, this creates tremendous variability amongst students.

Kerry State is one such institution where admissions scores have dramatically increased over the last five years. The average two-part (critical reading and math) SAT score for a deposited student in 2009 was 1,066 and in 2013 was 1,111; representing a 45 point increase. Meanwhile, the minimum SAT score for a specially admitted student-athlete has remained stagnant (Kerry State Admissions Office, 2013). This has put specially admitted student-athletes in a disadvantageous position as it relates to academics. These students are now in the classroom with more academically prepared students and, on average, struggling to earn a degree.

A large percentage of each special admit class (2007-2011) did not graduate and are no longer pursuing a degree at Kerry State. For example, as of spring 2014, 49% of specially

admitted student-athletes from the 2007 incoming class had not graduated and are no longer pursuing a degree at Kerry State. Of the 19 that did not graduate, 11 left during or after their first year. This equates to over 28% of the 2007 special admit class leaving after only being on campus for one year or less. These data paint a grim picture of the struggles of a population permitted to enroll and not supported academically. Kuh (2005) writes, “after controlling for student background characteristics (such as ability and academic preparation), the student development research indicates that a key factor in student success is student engagement” (p. 87). Therefore, the issue of specially admitted student-athlete success is not an athletic department problem, but rather a wider Kerry State issue that revolves around student engagement and requires the concerted effort of multiple constituents.

Student Engagement

Student engagement is student and institution driven (Kuh, 2005). From an institutional standpoint, engagement means providing adequate support programs, academic advising, and enhanced on and off-campus learning opportunities. The support programs should be student-centered and encourage personal growth, campus involvement, and leadership development (Schilling & Schilling, 2005). From the student standpoint, engagement means actively participating in educationally related activities (Kuh, 2005).

As a result of the athletic demands of participating at the college level, many student-athletes are unable to attend campus-wide events and join particular clubs and organizations. When you add roughly 20 hours of practice, combined with weight training, film study, and team meetings, athletic demands are closer to 30 hours (Holsendolph, 2008). If you factor in 12-16 hours of class time and 15 to 20 hours of studying, student-athletes have anywhere from 57 to 66

hours of obligations each week (Griffin, 2007). The student-athlete is challenged to find adequate time to explore academic interests, thus impacting student engagement.

This research project revealed two major issues regarding student engagement. First, student-athletes have a hectic schedule that leaves little time for campus involvement. Student-athletes do not have the same flexibility during the day because of athletic demands. Second, so much of student-athlete engagement revolves around programs designed by the coaching staffs of individual teams. Of the student-athletes interviewed, only one discussed partaking in a club or program that was not related to athletics. When asked about clubs and organizations, one cross country student explained, "I'm not but I wish I was. I'm always interested in other things but with school and my sport, I really do not have any time to do anything else." Student-athletes at Kerry State are very engaged only with activities associated with their perspective team.

Many of the coaches have established community service projects that connect student-athletes to the wider community. However, many of the participants in this project were only involved with athletic related organizations and programs; potentially isolating them from the rest of campus. Without the proper programming for this unique population, that includes exposing this group of students to the various clubs, organizations, and resources, student-athletes at Kerry State will continue to not participate in the academically enriching programs being offered. Student engagement is a vital component for retention and student success (Kuh, 2005). Student-athletes at Kerry State will continue to struggle if dramatic changes are not implemented.

From a university standpoint, this is problematic, especially when specially admitted student-athletes decide to discontinue participating in their sport. Their entire support system is rooted on an athletic foundation. In this research project, coaches were found to be extremely

helpful at assisting specially admitted student-athletes, serving in a mentor role and supporting the student-athletes in a variety of ways. This support, however, is not sufficient enough to track and monitor the graduation progress of student-athletes. When a student's entire foundation is grounded in athletics, failure once the student stops participating is imminent. This study revealed that coaches also serving as advisors is not adequate for the support that is needed.

Division III Athletics

Comparing specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State with Division I athletes is like comparing the least protected group to the most protected. One group has little support, the other superfluous amounts. One does not enter into a special program, while the other is closely monitored and tracked. At first, it appears there are only glaring differences between these groups, however surprising parallels are worthy of further exploration. Here, I will juxtapose those that participate at the Division I level and those that have been specially admitted to participate at a Division III institution.

The NCAA uses a sliding scale to verify eligibility for Division I athletes. The sliding scale allows students with higher GPAs to possess lower SAT scores and vice versa. For example, a student with a 3.0 GPA needs a 620 SAT score, while a student with a 2.0 GPA needs a 1010 SAT score (NCAA, 2014). At Kerry State, specially admitted student-athletes must have an 820 SAT score and 2.0 GPA to enroll. Both groups of student-athletes are permitted to enroll with far lower scores than the general student population. In this project, participants enrolled with an average SAT score of 919, roughly 200 points below the general student population (Kerry State Admissions Report, 2013).

Recently, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill advisor and instructor, Mary Willingham, made national headlines when she produced findings on 183 academically

challenged student-athletes from 2004-2012. Her report revealed that 60% of those athletes had a reading level between fourth and eighth grade, while an additional 8-10% read below a third grade level (Ganim, 2014). These claims were hotly contested by university officials, as well as members of the athletic department, including head basketball coach Roy Williams. At the end of the spring 2014 semester, Willingham resigned from her academic advisor position at UNC and currently has a lawsuit pending against the institution (Blythe, 2014).

Former University of North Carolina basketball star Rashard McCants (enrolled at UNC from 2002-2005) recently made claims that seem to corroborate Willingham's finding. McCants stated that he rarely attended class and tutors wrote his term papers while he was enrolled at UNC (Delsohn, 2014). In June 2014, McCants told ESPN's Outside the Lines that, "You're there to make revenue for the college. You're there to put fans in the seats. You're there to bring prestige to the university by winning games." The case at UNC may be an outlier and there may not be widespread corruption at the Division I level. However, athletics at the Division I level is a multi-billion dollar industry. The comments from McCants are indicative of the athlete first mentality that is prevalent at all levels of college athletics. These allegations have increased the conversation around ethical issues of athletic programs in which the university is impugned.

Athletics at the Division III level only generates a fraction of the money compared to those at the Division I level. There is not the same financial incentive for widespread academic fraud. Maintaining a stellar athlete's eligibility status at the Division I level could generate millions of dollars for an institution and countless amounts of publicity. A study by Drexel University and the National College Players Association (NCPA) estimated a football player at the Division I level between 2011 and 2015 is worth about \$178,000 for that particular institution. Fair market value for star athletes like Johnny Manziel (football) and Andrew

Wiggins (basketball) were estimated to be \$547,000 and \$1,600,000 respectively (Koba, 2014). Division I college athletic programs are big business, which is why reports like the one at UNC are plausible. Maintaining a student's eligibility at the Division I level is of the utmost importance for participating institutions. An ineligible student is not permitted to participate in athletics and could cost the institution an enormous amount of revenue.

Student-athletes at Kerry State do not have advisors producing papers or enrolling them in phantom courses. There are not athletic advisors at Kerry State with the task of only keeping students eligible. Whereas student-athletes at the Division I have their academic needs addressed, those at the Division III level are often left to the coaching staff. Specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State are not tracked and supported. It is appropriate then to question the marriage between a student-athlete that enrolled with lower academic scores and the advisement that he/she receives, especially when that advisement is coming from members of the coaching staff. This study produced evidence that coaches play a vital role in the personal and professional development of players. It also produced data that the coaching staff may be ill equipped to handle the type of advising needed for specially admitted student-athletes.

As discussed in the findings section, coaches have a vested interest in the team's success. This does not imply that they are not concerned with the individual student-athlete, but their livelihood is based on team results. It is possible for a coach, who in many cases is the first person a student-athlete pursues when academic issues arise, to provide information that is self-serving and advantage to the team and not necessarily the individual. For example, it is understandable that a coach could advise a student to enroll in a less strenuous course or not take a full course load in season. Yet, this type of advisement has the potential to delay graduation and be detrimental to the individual's goals. Therefore, what role should coaches play in

academic advisement? What responsibility does Kerry State have to ensure that all students are put on a path to success?

Exploitation of Student-Athletes

At its core, college athletics is an enormous opportunity for student-athletes to participate in sports, while earning a degree. The student's athletic abilities have paved the way for an opportunity to attend college; without it, that opportunity may not have been present. Issues arise when institutions are only concerned with athletic performance and not academic performance. The question for colleges is: are they implementing policies to ensure that student-athletes are on a path to earning a degree? Here, I will discuss the issue of student-athlete exploitation and how it relates to Division III athletics.

Exploitation is a term typically synonymous with Division I athletics. This term has been used for several decades to describe the relationship between Division I student-athletes and their particular institution (Johnson, 1985). However, this project proved that exploitation issues are also prevalent at the Division III level and are closely tied to support and programming.

At the commencement of intercollegiate athletics being implemented on college campuses, athletic programs were provided to enhance the student's experience. Now, college athletics is a business that revolves around ticket sales and TV and merchandising contracts. These contracts are signed with the expectation that student-athletes will perform at a high level in front of thousands of spectators. This exchange of services, particularly at the Division I level, helps generate millions of dollars for institutions and their athletic programs.

For major college programs, it is an arms race to build the most remarkable sports facilities. For example, in 2013, The University of Alabama spent nine million dollars upgrading its football complex. The facility is equipped with hot tubs, pool tables, arcade rooms, and

meeting rooms with leather chairs (Manfred, 2013). The football complex is a marketing ploy to attract the best high school football players in the country. This facility is one of hundreds around the country that have been built with the hard work of student-athletes on the playing field.

Student-athletes at the Division I level benefit from receiving athletic scholarships and furthering their athletic skills in preparation for a professional career in sports. For some, college is nothing more than a way to showcase athletic abilities. Some may argue that college athletes are not being exploited, and are provided a free education through the use of an athletic scholarship. However, when there is no intention from the college or NCAA to ensure that student-athletes are graduating, it is apparent that the mutual agreement by colleges and student-athletes is not being upheld.

The National Basketball Association (NBA) has a policy that mandates a player must be 19 years old before being drafted. Therefore, many of the best players attend college for a year or so and leave to enter the NBA draft. It is appropriate to question why an institution would allow a student-athlete to enroll, typically with much lower scores than the general student body, and never commit themselves to their academics. This benefits the institution because the student plays for a year or so and helps sell out athletic venues. This also has the potential to benefit the student that gets drafted and has a long prosperous professional athletic career. However, what about the players that never gets drafted and fails to graduate or the players that are drafted and their professional career is over in a few years? The institution continues to thrive, while the student-athlete that was never really on a successful path does not have a degree to enter the workforce. One can easily make the case that the student-athlete was exploited for their athletic skills and ability to draw large audiences.

Exploitation is a term not typically discussed with Division III athletics, however this study produced data that proves otherwise. At Kerry State, specially admitted student-athletes are only permitted to enroll because of their athletic abilities. Specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State were permitted to enroll and are not specifically supported in their academic endeavors; unlike other special admit populations that receive guidance to ensure they are on a path to graduate. Therefore, it is right to question if many of these students have been exploited because of their athletic abilities and were never really on a path to graduate. Unlike many at the Division I level, specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State that do not graduate are left with the additional burden of college loans. Repaying college loans without a college degree is an appalling scenario for so many that fail to complete their undergraduate degree.

When the proper support and guidance is provided, it is beneficial for the student-athlete and institution. The student-athlete is able to take advantage of the opportunity and graduate with a college degree that enables him/her to have a successful career. However, without the proper support it certainly feels like specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State are being exploited. Currently, these students do not enroll into a special program and are not supported in their academic endeavors.

Implications

This study has significant implications for research, practice, and policy. This section outlines those implications based on best practices and the finding of this research project.

Research

Available research surrounding Division I student-athletes is widely published and effortlessly accessible. Issues regarding Division I athletics are frequently debated by sports enthusiasts, university administrators, and scholars alike. Currently these issues include student

pay for play, the prospect of forming unions, and academic fraud. These issues are mostly applicable at the Division I level, as sold out arenas generate billions each year for sponsors, advertisement, and universities.

Many of the student-athletes participating at the Division I level are on full or partial scholarship and afforded an array of services and resources. For example, Division I football teams are permitted 85 scholarship players on the team (NCAA, 2013). Resources for athletes at the Division I level include, but are not limited to, tutoring, advising, counseling, and career management (Duderstadt, 2003). These services are provided to ensure that student-athletes are eligible and on pace to graduate. Division I institutions spend millions each year to ensure student-athletes receive the best academic services and remain eligible.

Conversely, Division III athletic budgets are typically much smaller when compared to Division I institutions. Division III athletics is vastly different than Division I and Division II and is not well-researched (Tobin, 2005). Information regarding Division III athletics is not regularly publicized even though there are more student-athletes participating at the Division III level than any other division (NCAA, 2014). This research topic warrants further consideration.

In addition to more research being conducted on a population that is vulnerable and unprotected, a multiple case design to explore a variety of Division III institutions would elucidate best practices in addressing the challenges revealed in this study (Yin, 2003). A multiple case study would examine the programming used at numerous Division III institutions and evaluate how specially admitted student-athletes are supported in their academic endeavors. This type of study could have significant implications for a population that is in dire need of academic support.

Furthermore, exploring issues of gender and sport could have implications for academic performance and support. At the Division I level, female student-athletes' six year graduation rates for enrollment classes between 2001 and 2004 were 15% higher than male student-athletes (NCAA, 2012). Football and men's basketball were found to have the lowest graduation rates. Analyzing gender and sport at the Division III level could have significant implications for the way groups of student-athletes are supported.

It is unknown if the large discrepancies in graduation rates pertain to Division III student-athletes, as the NCAA does not collect and analyze data regarding this division (NCAA, 2014). In this project, the issues of gender and sport were not analyzed; however it is perceived that certain groups are more successful than others. Therefore, I recommend a study that examines academic performance between gender and sport and includes the entire population of student-athletes at Kerry State and potentially other Division III institutions (Yin, 2003). Data collected could begin a dialogue of how to better assist student-athletes at the Division III level. This type of study would explore differences in the experiences of male and female athletes and the particular sports they play.

Practice

The findings of this research project have implications for current and future practices at Kerry State. These implications play an important role in the way student-athletes at Kerry State could be academically assisted, particularly those that have been specially admitted. These implications were envisioned with Kerry State's financial constraints in mind. Additionally, these implications were considered with the prospect of actually being implemented. This study was designed through an advocacy lens with hopes of implementing real change, potentially impacting the lives of students (Creswell, 2007).

Student success. As a result of time constraints, especially in-season, participants in this research project were unable to participate in the various programs offered on campus. As a result, many were not afforded opportunities to learn about the plethora of resources and programs offered at Kerry State. These programs, offered to the general student population, include workshops regarding financial aid, academic advising, career development, tutoring, and healthy campus initiatives (stress management, nutrition, and weight control workshops). These programs often conflict with team responsibilities, including weight training, practice, team meetings, film sessions, and games. As such, the proceeding recommendations took into account the constraints of participating in athletics at the Division III level.

During the qualitative phase, student-athletes and athletic personnel were asked if the athletic department or university could do anything to better assist student-athletes in their academic endeavors. The question was posed to garner information about potential changes the students and staff would like implemented. One female, cross country runner suggested that Kerry State have a workshop for all incoming freshman athletes to inform them of available resources. When asked what types of information she would like disseminated during the workshop, she listed tutoring, counseling, and help with personal problems. A few of the athletic personnel also discussed having a workshop to help familiarize student-athletes with the resources available at Kerry State. One athletic advisor explained:

It is a major adjustment trying to get used to the academic process. I wish there was a way to get them acclimated to the school year, especially for the fall sport students. I think maybe a workshop for student-athletes would be beneficial.

The one glaring issue with offering a workshop is student-athlete's schedules. Currently, Kerry State offers 85 undergraduate degrees and each one has a freshman instructional guide. This guide informs the registrar's office of the mandatory courses freshman need to enroll during

their first semester (Kerry State Admissions Office, 2013). Additionally, there is great variation of when courses are offered throughout the day. As such, it is extremely difficult to offer a semester long workshop all specially admitted student-athletes could manage into their already hectic schedules. A better solution to assisting specially admitted student-athletes in their transition to Kerry State would be to offer a semester long course incorporated into their schedule. This course would fit a nonprogram requirement and count towards graduation.

Recently, Kerry State began offering a *Student Success* course for students enrolling in a special admit program. Similar to athletic special admits, these students also enrolled with lower academic scores. Students enrolling in the *Student Success* course are asked to complete the course during the summer 2014 semester at Kerry State. Although specially admitted student-athletes enroll with lower academic scores, they are not required to register for this course.

The *Student Success* course provides the necessary resources and is a natural fit for specially admitted student-athletes. Topics covered in this course include time management, study skills, academic integrity, financial literacy, identity and diversity, and wellness. Additionally, students would have the opportunity to explore different clubs and organizations outside of athletics, potentially reducing the isolating element of being involved with athletics. Implications include student-athletes establishing other connections outside of athletics.

I recommend that all specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State enroll in the *Student Success* course during their first semester on campus. Enrolling would help specially admitted student-athletes transition to college level academics and develop the personal and professional skills needed to be successful. It would expose them to campus resources that could assist them when difficult issues arise. Additionally, this course would help specially admitted student-athletes make connections outside of athletics, thus increasing student engagement. A

more engaged student body could improve institutional retention and graduation rates (Astin, 1985; Kuh, 1995; Tinto, 1975). Additionally, increased retention rates from this population could increase team performance as more student-athletes would be eligible to participate.

Increased communication. In addition to the *Student Success* course, increased communication is recommended between the athletic department and university advising center. From a university standpoint, it would be prudent to monitor specially admitted student-athletes. At the moment, members of the athletic department are not tracking this group that enrolled with lower academic scores; nor are members of the advising center. Open lines of communication could have significant implications for a vulnerable population that is at-risk of graduating.

During interviews, one student-athlete that did not graduate and is no longer enrolled stated:

It would have been nice if someone would have followed up with me after I stopped playing. I felt like since I wasn't playing anymore, no one cared. I stopped going to class and no one checked in on me at all. I think just because I wasn't playing I still should have had support.

With increased communication, members of the athletic and advising departments could collaborate to handle student-athletes struggling in either athletics or academics. This would allow for each to assess the situation and provide the necessary resources. For example, if a student-athlete was not doing well in their particular sport, the coaching staff could alert the advising department that the student was in danger of losing an important component to their academic success.

Increased communication amongst the departments could have significant implications for retention and graduation rates. One of the most profound statements in this research project came from a women's head coach who succinctly stated, "When they (specially admitted student-athletes) are average or poor in both, they usually struggle." This statement is at the

essence of this project because it illuminates the structural deficiencies of the special admit system. Specially admitted student-athletes that struggle with athletics no longer have a support system to aid their academic progress. The coach no longer has a vested interest in their academic endeavors. Increased lines of communication could better assist these students and provide the structure that is desperately needed. It is the responsibility of Kerry State to ensure the academic success of all students.

Policy

The implications of this research project regarding policy are essential for establishing a fair and ethical system that is in the best interests of the student-athlete. To determine eligibility, the NCAA uses a sliding scale that involves the student-athlete's high school GPA and SAT score. The sliding scale system is used at the Division I level, while student-athletes need an 820 SAT score and 2.0 GPA to enroll at the Division II level (NCAA, 2010). However, at the Division III level, admission standards are ambiguous and poorly defined.

Without enrollment standards for Division III athletics, individual institutions are permitted to employ their own admission standards. The NCAA (2014) website states, "Division III features student-athletes who are subject to the same admission standards, academic standards, housing, and support services as the general student body." This statement is contradictory to how it is applied and implemented; Kerry State is not the only Division III institution employing a special admit system.

These student-athletes are not "subject to the same admission standards.....as the general student body" (NCAA, 2013). This population represents the largest number of students participating (NCAA, 2013), yet so little is known about this group of students. Without their athletic abilities they would not have been permitted to enroll. A poorly defined system has

forced Division III institutions to create their own admissions criteria. It would be prudent for the NCAA to craft a uniform enrollment policy for all Division III institutions. This policy would ensure minimum guidelines for students seeking to participate at this level.

Additionally, it would be just for the NCAA to begin collecting and analyzing data on special admits at all levels. Currently, the NCAA does not have limits on the number of special admits that an athletic program can use (Alesia, 2008). The exploration of special admits would examine the long-term implications of enrolling students with a lower profile. What happens to the student-athletes that are permitted to enroll and drop out after their first year?

At the Division I level, student-athletes earn athletic scholarships, thus limiting the need for student loans. However, at the Division III level, students are not afforded athletic scholarships and must pay for their education. As such, many student-athletes at the Division III level need student loans to pay for college. What is the long-term impact of not completing a degree and having student loans? These students not only have student debt, but also do not have a degree, thus limiting their career opportunities. Is the NCAA culpable in allowing underprepared student-athletes to enroll without providing support systems?

Conclusion

Specially admitted student-athletes are a vulnerable population that was granted a special admit to enroll at Kerry State because of their athletic abilities. Although they failed to meet the general admission requirements, their coaches believed they possessed the skills necessary to improve the team, which is why the special admit was granted. These students do not enter into a special program and are not supported academically. This study produced evidence that without the proper programming and support, specially admitted student-athletes at Kerry State will continue to struggle in their academic endeavors.

Division III colleges and universities that implement special admit programs are placed in a difficult predicament of how to ensure the academic success of students. It is the role of the institution to determine how to implement policies that will make certain the success of all students (Astin, 1985; Kuh, 1995; Tinto, 1993). The objective for athletic programs should focus on ensuring that student-athletes are excelling in the classroom and being prepared for life after graduation. It is a major disservice to the student-athlete when athletic departments focus solely on maintaining a student's eligibility. The proper support will allow student-athletes to advance towards graduation, and continue to compete in their respective sport, thus enhancing their team's chance of winning. This study has significant implications for the way student-athletes at the Division III level should be supported. From an advocacy perspective, it is unjust to continue to exploit these students just because they are athletically gifted (Creswell, 2007).

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Appendix A

Text of Recruitment Email for Student Survey

Greetings,

You have been selected to participate in my study on Kerry State University student-athletes. I am gathering information on what academic services are provided to student-athletes at Kerry State and how students use these services. Your participation in this survey will shed light on the academic success of Division III student-athletes.

Your participation in this study may have significant implications for future student-athletes at Kerry State. As a former student-athlete, I understand how valuable your time is; therefore this survey should only take 10-15 minutes.

Your responses are confidential and will be kept secure at all times. No identifiable information – name, identification number, etc. – will be revealed when describing results.

I appreciate your willingness to participate. Please click here to begin: [SURVEY](#)

If you have any questions regarding this research, you may contact me Sean Hendricks, at hendrickss@rowan.edu or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Tyrone McCombs at mccombst@rowan.edu.

Appendix B

Student-Athlete Questionnaire

While your participation in this survey is voluntary and you are not required to answer any of the questions herein, your cooperation and participation are important and are greatly appreciated. If you choose to participate, please understand that all responses are strictly confidential and no personally identifiable information will be used in this research project.

Directions: Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

Name:

1. Gender:

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

2. Ethnic Background:

- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Not Hispanic or Latino

If you chose Hispanic or Latino, please choose one of the following:

- ☐ Central or South American
- ☐ Cuban
- ☐ Hispanic- other
- ☐ Mexican
- ☐ Puerto Rican

Regardless of your responses to questions 1 & 2, please choose one or more race categories from the list below:

- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- ☐ White

3. What year did you enroll at Kerry State?

- ☐ 2007
- ☐ 2008
- ☐ 2009
- ☐ 2010
- ☐ 2011

4. Are you still enrolled at Kerry State?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If no, please explain.

5. What is (was) your academic major at Kerry State?
6. Please list the varsity sport(s) that you have played at Kerry State, if any.
7. Have you ever been ineligible at Kerry State University since enrolling?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
- If yes, please explain.
8. Does (did) your varsity team use a study hall program?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
- If yes, how effective do you believe the program was/is toward your academic success?
- ☐ Not at all Effective
 - ☐ Somewhat Effective
 - ☐ Effective
 - ☐ Very Effective
9. If you are (were) a student-athlete at Kerry State University, what has been your biggest challenge?
10. Who or what has been the most helpful for your academic progress?
11. What or who has been the biggest distraction for you during your college experience?
12. How committed are you to your academics?
- ☐ Not at all Committed
 - ☐ Somewhat Committed
 - ☐ Committed
 - ☐ Very Committed
13. How committed is your head coach to your academics?
- ☐ Not at all Committed
 - ☐ Somewhat Committed
 - ☐ Committed
 - ☐ Very Committed
14. How committed is Rowan University to ensuring your academic success?
- ☐ Not at all Committed
 - ☐ Somewhat Committed
 - ☐ Committed
 - ☐ Very Committed
15. Would you be willing to participate in a 30 minute interview regarding your experience as a student-athlete? Yes or No

Appendix C

Letter of Informed Consent

Title of Project: Multimethod Study of a Higher Education Special Admissions Policy: Exploring How Student-Athletes Navigate Their Educational Experiences

Investigator: Sean Hendricks (Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate)

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Tyrone McCombs, Assistant Provost and Dean/Associate Professor

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges that specially admitted student-athletes endure as they navigate their educational experiences. This study will examine the academic services provided and ways in which students interact with these services.

Description and Procedures: I will use a three-phase, explanatory sequential mixed methods design to obtain quantitative data before crafting a qualitative phase that permits further analysis. In the first phase, quantitative phase of the study, a questionnaire will be administered to the previous five classes (2007-2011) of specially admitted student-athletes at Rowan. In the second phase, qualitative phase of the study, standardized open-ended interviews will be conducted to explore the perceptions of those involved with the special admit system. My findings and analysis will be developed as a result of both phases.

Risks: Data collected will be kept secure and anonymous. You are able to withdraw from this study at any time. There are minimal risks involved with your participation. No identifiable information – name, identification number, etc. – will be used when describing the results, in order to alleviate risks.

Benefits: The research involving student-athletes at the Division I level is extensive, however very few studies address the phenomenon of student-athletes participating at the Division III level. Division III athletic programs are not permitted to offer athletic scholarships, nor are they required to report graduation rates for student-athletes (NCAA, 2011). Unfortunately for those at the Division III level, very few studies explore how these student-athletes navigate their academic experiences, and even fewer examine students that failed to qualify for general admission and required a special admit to enroll at a particular institution. The objective of this research project is to gain a better understanding of the academic standing of specially admitted student-athletes and add to the literature regarding Division III student-athletes. The study is designed to explore the academic services provided and ways in which students interact with these services.

Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality: All of your responses, writings, or other materials will be kept anonymous. No identifier whatsoever will exist to link you to your responses. The research data will be utilized to develop a dissertation, and possibly published articles and conference presentations. Please note all identifying responses will be masked to keep your identity confidential. This study is designed to exclude minors. Please be aware that you must be 18 years or older to participate in this study. By signing below, you are stating that you are at least 18 years old.

Freedom to Withdraw: Participation in the study is completely voluntary. Each interview will last approximately 30 minutes. Should you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time. Your signature below gives me permission to use the data collected from your interview during the project. (You may also request a copy of this form for your records). Any further questions about this study can be answered by the principal investigator, Sean Hendricks, at hendrickss@rowan.edu, or you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Tyrone McCombs, at mccombst@rowan.edu.

Participant Name _____ Date _____

Researcher Name _____ Date _____

Appendix D

Interview Protocol for Specially Admitted Student-Athletes

Thank you for meeting with me today. As previously discussed, our interview will be recorded and is completely voluntary. If at any point you do not feel comfortable, you may withdraw from the interview. You have been purposely selected to participate in my study pertaining to student-athletes at Rowan. I have planned this interview to last no longer than 30 minutes. Are you ready to begin?

- 1) Please tell me about yourself.
- 2) In your view, what are some of the major challenges about being a student-athlete at Rowan?
- 3) When you found yourself struggling with coursework was there anyone (academic advisors, coaches, tutors, professors, etc.) that assisted you in your academic endeavors?
- 4) In what ways did time management help or hurt your academic progress? Please explain.
- 5) How did the head coach/coaching staff impact your experience at Rowan? Did they do anything specific to assist you in your academic endeavors?
- 6) Do you believe playing a sport helped or hurt you academic progress? How so?
- 7) Did your team use a study hall program? If yes, was there anything specifically that you found beneficial? If no, do you think a study hall program would have been beneficial?
- 8) Was there anything the athletic department or university could have done to better assist you in your academic endeavors?
- 9) Did playing a sport help you feel like part of the Rowan community? How so? Were you involved in any clubs or organizations outside of your sport? If so, how was your experience with each?
- 10) Is there anything you would like to add to the interview that describes your experience as a student-athlete?

Probing Statements

Please elaborate.

Please provide an example.

Appendix E

Interview Protocol for Athletic Personnel

Thank you for meeting with me today. As previously discussed, our interview will be recorded and is completely voluntary. If at any point you do not feel comfortable, you may withdraw from the interview. You have been purposely selected to participate in my study pertaining to student-athletes at Rowan. I have planned this interview to last no longer than 30 minutes. Are you ready to begin?

- 1) Please tell me about your role at Rowan.
- 2) In your view, what are some of the major challenges for student-athletes at Rowan?
- 3) When you find student-athletes struggling with coursework is there anyone (academic advisors, coaches, tutors, professors, etc.) who typically assists them in their academic endeavors?
- 4) In what ways do you think time management helps or hurts student-athletes' academic progress? Please explain.
- 5) How does the head coach/coaching staff impact the student-athletes' experience at Rowan? Do they do anything specific to assist with a student's academic endeavors?
- 6) Do you believe playing a sport helps or hurts student-athletes' academic progress? How so?
- 7) What are your thoughts about the study program/system offered for student-athletes? What changes could be made to better the study hall program?
- 8) Is there anything the athletic department or university could do to better assist student-athletes in their academic endeavors?
- 9) Do you believe that playing a sport helps student-athletes feel like part of the Rowan community? How so? In your opinion is it important for student-athletes to also be involved in other clubs/organization? Please explain.
- 10) Is there anything you would like to add to the interview that describes the student-athlete experience at Rowan?

Probing Statements

Please elaborate.

Please provide an example.

Appendix F

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letter



November 28, 2012

Sean Hendricks
Rowan University
Admissions Office
Savitz Hall
Glassboro, NJ 08028

Dear Sean Hendricks:

In accordance with the University's IRB policies and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to inform you that the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your project:

IRB application number: 2013-081

Project Title: Multimethod Analysis of a Higher Education Special Admission Policy: Exploring How Student-Athletes Navigate their Educational Experiences

In accordance with federal law, this approval is effective for **one calendar year** from the date of this letter. If your research project extends beyond that date or if you need to make significant modifications to your study, you must notify the IRB immediately. Please reference the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

Please retain copies of consent forms for this research for three years after completion of the research.

If, during your research, you encounter any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, you must report this immediately to Dr. Harriet Hartman (hartman@rowan.edu or call 856-256-4500, ext. 3787) or contact Dr. Shreekanth Mandayam, Associate Provost for Research (shreek@rowan.edu or call 856-256-5150).

If you have any administrative questions, please contact Karen Heiser (heiser@rowan.edu or 856-256-5150).

Sincerely,

Harriet Hartman, Ph.D.
Chair, Rowan University IRB

c: Sean Hendricks, Admissions Office, Savitz Hall

Office of Research
Bole Hall
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701

856-256-5150
856-256-4425 fax